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BY LOUIS BECKE.

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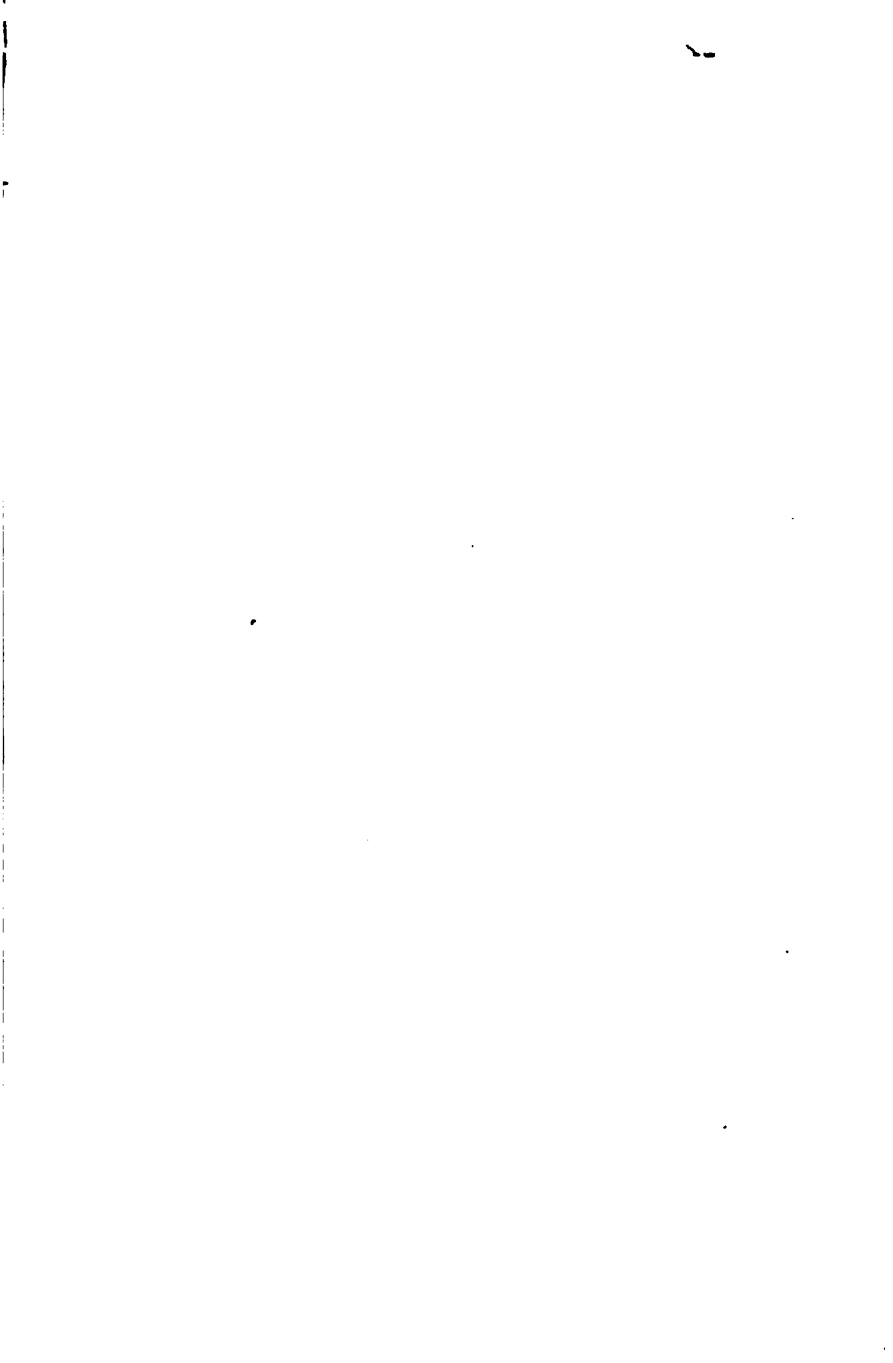
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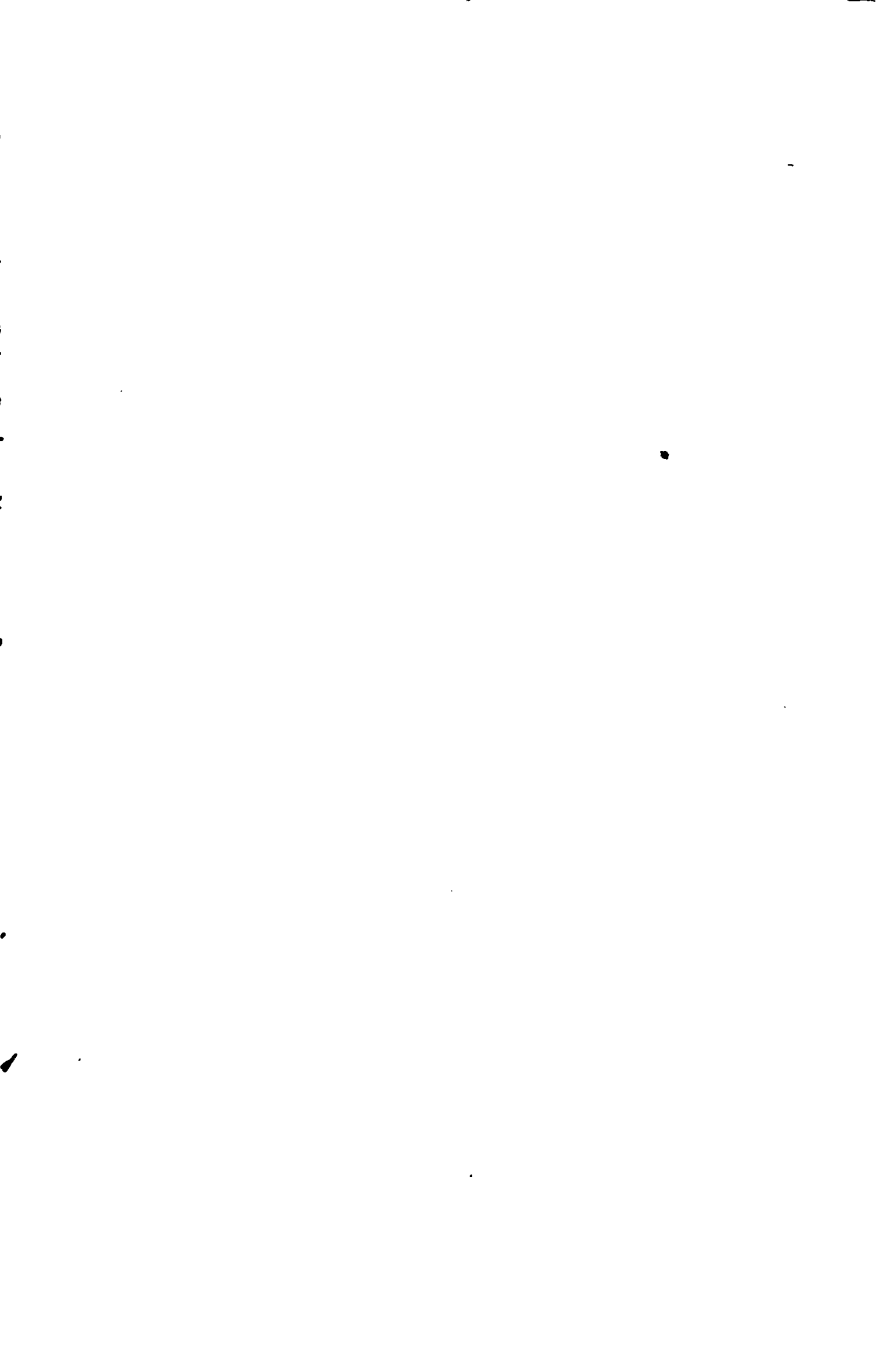
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TOM GERRARD

BY

LOUIS BECKE



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1904

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TO "ALREMA"
I DEDICATE THIS STORY OF HER
FATHER'S NATIVE LAND

CAEN, FRANCE. 1904.



TOM GERRARD

CHAPTER I

"HALLO! young lady, what on earth are you doing here?" and Gerrard bent down over his horse's shoulder, and looked inquiringly into the face of a small and exceedingly ill-clad girl of about ten years of age.

"Nothing, sir, I only came out for a walk, and to get some pippies."

"And where do you get them?"

"Down there, sir, on the sand," and the child pointed with a strong, sun-browned hand to the beach, which was within a mile.

"Eat them?"

"Yes — they're lovely. Jim and I roast them in the stockman's kitchen when auntie has gone to bed."

"And who is Jim?"

"Jim Incubus; I'm Mary Incubus."

"Mary *what*?"

"Incubus, sir."

Gerrard dismounted, and tying his reins to a stirrup, let his horse graze. Then taking his pipe out of his pocket, he filled and lit it, and motioned to the child to sit down beside him upon a fallen honeysuckle tree.

"What is your auntie's name, my dear?" and he took the child's hand in his.

"Mrs Elizabeth Westonley."

"Ah! I thought so. Now, did you ever hear her talk of an Uncle Tom?"

"Yes, sir," replied the child, wonderingly, "he's a cattleman in the Northern Territory."

"Well! *I'm* the cattleman, Mary. I'm the Uncle Tom, and I've come to see you all."

"All the way from Cape York! Why! Uncle Westonley says it's two thousand miles from here."

"So it is, my dear," and the man stroked the child's tousled chestnut hair caressingly; "quite two thousand miles," and then as he looked at her pityingly he muttered something very uncomplimentary to Aunt Elizabeth.

"Are you really my uncle Thomas Gerrard?"

"I am really your Uncle Tom Gerrard, and you are my niece Mary. Your mother was my sister, whose name was Mary."

"Uncle Westonley likes you."

"Does he?" and the young man's kindly grey eyes smiled as he stroked his pointed beard. "Good old Ted!"

"Who's Ted?"

"Your Uncle Westonley, of course. Don't you call him 'Uncle Ted'?"

"Oh, *no*!" and the child's big eyes looked startlingly into his, "I call him 'Uncle Westonley.' Aunt Elizabeth said I must never say 'Uncle Ted,' as it's vulgar, and she won't allow it, and uncle says I must be obedient to her."

Gerrard put out his right arm, drew her to him, and looked intently into her face. In her dreamy, violet-hued eyes, with the dark pencilled brows, and the small delicate mouth, he saw the image of his dead twin-sister, Mary.

"Poor little mite!" he again said to himself pityingly, as he looked at her coarse though not ill-kept clothing, "Lizzie always was a cold-hearted prig, and always will be to the end of her days—even in her moribund moments. How could she let this child wander out so far away from the station." Then he took two or three great puffs at his pipe. "How far is it to Marumbah, little niece Mary?"

"Five miles, sir."

"Don't say 'sir.' Who taught you to say 'sir'?"

"Aunt Elizabeth."

"But you must not say 'sir' to me. I'm your uncle. And you must call me 'Uncle Tom.' Understand?"

"Aunt Elizabeth insists on my saying 'sir' to gentlemen."

"Does she now? Well, my dear, you must never say 'sir' to me—I'll ask Aunt Elizabeth not to insist on your calling me 'sir.' You see I shouldn't like it. I want you to call me 'Uncle Tom.' Lots of people call me Tom. Some of 'em call me Tom and Jerry—short, you know, for Thomas Gerrard."

"Aunt Elizabeth says you're godless and wild."

"Does she really?" and the grey eyes twinkled. "That's only *her* way of talking, you see. 'Godless and wild' doesn't mean anything very bad when Aunt Elizabeth says it. It only means—well, nothing particular. When you are older you will understand."

"Yes, sir."

"'Uncle Tom'!"

"Yes, Uncle Tom."

"Now, Mary, what about these pippies? Will you let me come with you? I'm awfully fond of pippies—can eat bushels of 'em."

"Yes, Uncle Tom," and the child's face lighted up, "oh! I wish Jim was here too. Are you his uncle, too?"

Gerrard rubbed his cheek thoughtfully. His sister Elizabeth had no children, and he wondered who Jim could be.

"No, I *don't think* I am. When did he come to Marumbah?"

"Uncle Westonley brought him from Sydney about—about six months ago."

"Where is he now?"

"At home, with Aunt Elizabeth. He's been fractious, and is being punished."

"Being punished?"

"Yes, he's locked up in the spare room."

"What did he do?"

"Put a saddle on the brindle bull calf, and tried to make it backjump."

"Did it?"

"Oh, yes, beautifully, and Jim had his forehead cut, and a lot of blood came."

Gerrard laughed as he put down his pipe. "And what did Uncle Westonley say?"

"Uncle Westonley is away in Sydney," said the child gravely, and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears.

Gerrard understood. "Well, never mind, Mary; now you and I shall go and get these pippies."

From his saddle dees he took a pair of green-hide hobbles, lifted off the saddle with its valise, hobbled the horse, and then holding the child's hand in his, set out towards the beach.

"Now, Mary, you and I are going to have a great old time. First of all, you are going to show me how *you* get pippies. Then we will come back and cook them, and have some tea

and some damper as well, for I have both in my saddle-bags, and I have a wood duck too, which I shot this morning. Did you see it?"

"Yes, Uncle Tom; and your gun, too. Jim loves guns."

"Does he, my chick? Jim must be a man after my own heart."

"What's that, Uncle Tom?"

"Oh, I'll tell you some day. Now come along for the pippies. You show me how *you* get them, and I'll show you how *I* get them."

Holding his hand, the child led him down through the wild, sweet-smelling littoral scrub by a cattle track to the beach, where before them lay the blue Pacific, shining under the rays of the afternoon sun. The tide was low, and the "pippies" (cockles) were easily had, for they protruded their suckers out upon every few inches of the sand. Gerrard, booted and spurred as he was, went into the water, dug into the sand with his hands, and helped the child to fill the basket she carried, and then, realising that she was excited, and being himself determined upon a certain course of action, he walked slowly back with her to where he had left the horses.

"Mary, dear, just sit down, and listen to me. I am not going to Marumbah to-night, and you must stay with me. We shall be there early in the morning."

"Oh, Uncle Tom! Aunt Elizabeth will punish me."

"Don't be afraid, chick—she won't. I will explain everything to her in the morning."

In a few minutes he had lit two fires, and when the coals were glowing on one, and the child was attending to the roasting of the pippies, he was boiling a billy of tea on the other, and laying out some cold salt beef and damper from his saddle-bags.

"Come, chick, you and I are going to have a great time to-night, as I told you, pippies and wild duck, and tea and damper, and after that is over you shall be tucked up in my blankets, and sleep until we hear the bell-birds calling to us in the morning."

"Aunt Elizabeth——"

"That's all right, chick. Aunt Elizabeth will have nothing to say about it. I'll settle with *her*. Now, sit down on that blanket—I daresay you're hungry, eh?"

"Please, Uncle Tom, let me go home, Aunt Elizabeth——"

"We'll go home, chick, when the bell-birds and the crockets begin to sing. And Aunt Elizabeth won't say a word to you." He smiled somewhat grimly to himself, "don't be afraid of that. You and I are camping out to-night—like two old mates. By-the-way, where do you sleep at Marumbah?"

"In the little room, just off the saddle-room."

"And Jim?"

"Oh, Aunt Elizabeth doesn't like him to sleep in the house, so he sleeps in the stockman's spare room."

"How old is he, chick?"

The child bent her head in thought for a moment or two. "About ten, I think, Uncle Tom. He is really and truly such a good boy—Uncle Westonley says so, but Aunt Elizabeth says he is godless and an 'incubus.' What *does* incubus mean? I am one too."

"Nothing, nothing very much, little one," said Gerrard, as he held the breast of the wild duck he had plucked over the glowing coals of his fire; "you see, your Aunt Elizabeth doesn't mean to be unkind to you—it's only her way of saying that you and Jim are troublesome at times. And I don't think she will call you or Jim 'incubuses,' any more after to-morrow. Now, let us have something to eat. See, it is nearly dark."

They ate their supper to the murmur of the ever-sounding surf upon the beach, and then Gerrard spreading out his blankets under the shelter of a spreading wild honeysuckle, covered the child over with a sheet of waterproof cloth to keep off the dew.

"I must say my prayers, Uncle Tom."

"Yes, dear," he said softly, "but you

needn't get up. Can't you say them lying down?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Tom. That would be very wrong, and denotes laziness, Aunt Elizabeth says. Do you say *your* prayers lying down?"

"Yes, chick," was the prompt response, "generally when I'm lying down at night in the bush, looking up at the stars. And I daresay it does 'denote laziness,' as Aunt Elizabeth says. But at the same time I think it really doesn't matter to God whether one is lying down or sitting up, or on one's knees when we pray to Him."

"Oh, Uncle Tom! Are you quite sure?"

"Dead sure, little woman—as sure as ducks are ducks—especially when little girls are tired."

"Then I'll say my prayers lying down."

She clasped her two little sunbrowned hands together and said the Lord's Prayer, and then paused.

"Shall I say the extrack?"

"The extrack?"

"Yes, the extrack from the Catechism. Aunt Elizabeth composed some of it."

"Oh! she composed some of it, did she? Yes, by all means say 'the extract.'"

The child closed her eyes again, and began very slowly :

"'Before I slumber, O Lord, I commend myself to Thy care and protection, however unworthy and

thoughtless my conduct has been during the day now closed.” (“That’s Aunt Elizabeth,” muttered Gerrard under his breath.) “‘I will try hard to hasten my rebellious spirit,—no not hasten, but chasten—I always say that wrong, Uncle Tom—to reverently submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: to regulate my conduc’, and demean myself with all humility; to keep my hands from picking and stealing, to recollect that I may be called this night before Thee to answer for my many sins and transgressions.’ That’s all Uncle Tom.”

Gerrard listened with the utmost gravity.

“That’s all right, Mary; but I think it is a bit too long a prayer for very little girls. Now, by and by, I’ll teach you a new prayer.”

“A new prayer! Oh, that *will* be nice! Sometimes Uncle Westonley let’s me pray for Bunny.”

“Who is Bunny?”

“My native bear. I’ll show him to you to-morrow. You see, when Uncle Westonley comes to see me at night, after Aunt Elizabeth has heard me say the Lord’s Prayer, and the extrack, he lets me pray for Bunny because he is full of ticks, and Jim says he’ll die. I say ‘dear God, don’t let Bunny die, freshen and preserve him in Thy sight, and make him whole.’ I got that out of a book, and Uncle Westonley says it will do very nicely.”

"Couldn't be better, little woman. *I* think it's a grand prayer."

"But, Uncle Tom, Bunny has been sicker an' sicker, and won't eat anything but the very youngest, weeniest gum leaves, and Aunt Elizabeth says he's a hideous little beast. And Jim and me love him to death."

"Don't worry about what Aunt Elizabeth says," and Gerrard bent down and kissed her. "I'll try and cure Bunny for you. I know a heap of things about native bears and ticks, and know exactly what to do."

The child smiled delightedly into his face, "Oh! Uncle Tom, you are as kind as Uncle Westonley, good-night."

"Good-night, little woman," and then the man laid himself down upon the sandy ground beside her, with a certain resolve in his mind.

At six o'clock in the morning, he rode up to Marumbah Station with little Mary held in front of him. Mrs Westonley, pale-faced, austere, and much agitated, met him as he dismounted.

"Oh, dear, Thomas! Just fancy *you* finding the child and bringing her home! I sent out Toby, the black boy, to look for her, and I suppose he is looking for her still—the naughty——"

"That's all right, Lizzie, don't get into a

fluster," said Gerrard placidly, as he dismounted and kissed his sister, "Toby *did* find her—that is, he found her and me comfortably camped for the night. He's coming along presently with my packhorse."

Mrs Westonley turned angrily upon the child, and was about to deliver a lecture, when her brother placed his hand upon her arm and drew her aside.

"Look here, Lizzie, I'm your guest, and I'm also your brother; but if you bully that unfortunate youngster, I'll just get into my saddle again, and ride off without putting my foot over your threshold."

Mrs Westonley's pale, clear-cut face flushed deeply. "I never expected such a remark as this from you, Thomas."

"And I never expected that you would have treated your own sister's child as you have done," was the stern reply; "I found her five miles from here, wandering alone. Have you no love or sympathy in your heart, or compassion for children, because you have none yourself?" and the grey eyes flashed.

Mrs Westonley gazed at him in astonishment, and twined her hands together in mingled anger and fear that this brother—fifteen years younger than herself—should so dare to speak to *her*.

"The child is a great trial——"

"Aye, an 'incubus,' you call her, the poor little mite. But I hardly thought you read novels."

"*I* read novels! *Never!* What do you mean?"

Gerrard drew her inside the house, and patted her cheek, ready to forgive.

"Oh, I did read a book somewhere about a stepmother or an aunt or something of the kind, who was always talking about some unfortunate child committed to her care, as an 'incubus.'" Now, that's all I have to say. I *love* the kid already. She has Mary's eyes and Mary's voice, and, if *you* don't want her *I* do. When will breakfast be ready, old girl?"

"Eight o'clock," said Mrs Westonley faintly, wondering if she were awake or dreaming. Who but this handsome, sunburnt brother would dare to lecture her, and then wind up by addressing her as "old girl"!

CHAPTER II

WHEN Captain Richard Gerrard—the father of Mrs Westonley—came to Australia from India, he first settled in Gippsland, in Victoria. A retired military man, with ample means, he devoted himself successfully to pastoral pursuits, and soon took a leading part in the advancement of the colony. He had married the daughter of an English chaplain, by whom he had but one child—Elizabeth—and when she was but an infant of two years of age, Mrs Gerrard died. For thirteen years her husband remained faithful to her memory, and then did what all his neighbours regarded as a very sensible thing—he married the daughter of a neighbouring squatter, and sent his child to England to be educated. His second wife was a beautiful, vigorous, and well-trained woman, mentally and physically, and although her parents were English, she was a native of the colony, and, naturally enough, took the deepest interest in all that concerned the station, the advancement of her husband's interests, and the colony in which she was born. Two children were born to them, a twin son and

daughter, and as time went on, Captain Gerrard's station became one of the best in Victoria, and the "R over G" brand of cattle brought "top" prices in the Melbourne market.

After completing her education in England, Elizabeth Gerrard returned to Australia. She was a remarkably handsome girl, but cold, even to chilliness, in her manner, especially to her step-mother, for she had much resented her father's second marriage. The six years she had spent in England seemed to have entirely changed her character and disposition, and when soon after her return, Edward Westonley, a young squatter, who was the owner of Marumbah Downs, fell violently in love with her pink and white beauty, and she accepted him, even her father, although he loved her—was secretly pleased.

Marumbah Downs was over a hundred miles from Captain Gerrard's station, and there Westonley took his bride. He was a cheerful, somewhat careless man, very "horsey" in his tastes, and fond of good company. Both his father-in-law and Mrs Gerrard liked him greatly, and the two children by the second marriage, Tom and Mary, gave him their affection the first time they saw him.

The boy Tom grew up like most Australian-born boys of his class of life and surroundings, and before he was twenty years of age, was

managing one of his father's stations in Queensland, and managing it prosperously. Soon after he had taken charge, he heard from his father that his twin sister Mary was to be married to a local medical man—a Doctor Rayner, who had been her steady admirer since she was a girl of fifteen.

“It will be a very happy union,” wrote Captain Gerrard to his son, “of that I am certain, and although he’s too young a man to have much of a practice for some time, he’ll get along all right. And even if things do go against him, it won’t matter to him and Mary—I’ll stand to them. Mary is writing to you by this mail.” Then after alluding to some business matters in connection with his various stations he went on to say. “Westonley comes over to see us now and then—Lizzie never. Poor Westonley! Lizzie has crumpled him up altogether, although when he comes to see us he is the same cheery Ted of yore, and he, Rayner, and I had some grand kangarooing together when he was here last. Lizzie, during the past five years has become more and more crotchety, and has given herself up to ‘religious thought *and* work,’ as she calls it, from which I surmise that her’s is a reign of terror at Marumbah Downs. She has built a little tin-pot chapel in which there is not enough room to swing a cat by the tail, and had it opened a

few months ago by some swagger curate from Melbourne—poor old Preston, the Scotch parson at Marumbah township not being considered good enough, and having incurred her wrath by openly stating that when he had a cold he took whisky toddy at bedtime! then the silly woman—who rules poor Westonley with a rod of iron—had a notice put up in the men's quarters that all hands, from the head stockman down to the black boys, were to attend service every future Sunday morning and evening. Westonley—whom she wanted to conduct the service—bucked, and said he could not make an ass of himself before his employés, and the next day the entire crowd—stockmen, fencers, sawyers, etc.—rolled up to the station and gave Westonley a week's notice, and the poor fellow had to effect a compromise, they agreeing to come into the 'Chapel' and let Lizzie read them a chapter 'of suthin' outer the Bible,' if they could have the rest of the day for their usual Sunday recreations—euchre or kangarooing. I never thought Lizzie would turn out to be a crank, but a crank she is, and I'm afraid Westonley is not at all a happy man, though he yields to her in almost everything.

"Your mother has not been at all well for the past six months. She will be very lonely when Mary leaves the house, and you must come to us for a month or two next year; 'twill cheer

her up. She doesn't want Lizzie—neither do I ; she'd depress a dead bull calf, by just looking at him."

And then within a twelvemonth, came the tragedy of the Gerrard family.

Captain Gerrard, by Dr Rayner's advice, decided to take his wife to Sydney to consult a specialist, and Rayner went with them. They took passage on a coastal steamer named the *Cassowary*—a small paddle-wheel vessel of three hundred tons, old, ill-found, and utterly unable to cope with the savage easterly gale that met her as she rounded Cape Howe, and doots north for Sydney.

A fortnight later, Mary Rayner, as she was putting her two months' old baby girl to sleep, was called from her bedroom to see a stranger in the sitting-room. He was a stockman from a station seventy miles away on the coast.

He silently handed her a letter, and then turned away. She opened and read it. It was from the Police Inspector of the Cape Howe district, and in a few sympathetic words told her that the *Cassowary* had been lost near Cape Howe, and that every soul on board but one seaman and a child of four years of age had perished, and that her husband, her father and her mother had been buried three days previously.

She never survived the shock, and when

Tom Gerrard made his long journey down from North Queensland to Victoria, to comfort and aid his loved sister, he found that she had died a month before.

It took some months to settle up Captain Gerrard's affairs. He had made a will devising his head station to his wife, together with (less a certain reservation) the sum of ten thousand pounds. His two other stations—one in Central Queensland, and the other in the Far North of that colony,—he bequeathed, the former to his "dear daughter, Mary Rayner" and the latter to his "son, Thomas Gerrard, together with such moneys as might be at his (the testator's) death, lying to the credit of the two stations." Then—and here came the sting of the "certain reservation" to Elizabeth Westonley—to his "dearly esteemed son-in-law, Edward Westonley, of Marumbah Downs, I give and bequeath the sum of one thousand pounds, to be by him used in the manner he may deem best for the benefit of the Marumbah Jockey Club, of which for ten years he has been patron. To his wife (my daughter Elizabeth) I bequeath as a token of my appreciation of her efforts to improve the moral condition of illiterate and irreligious bushmen, the sum of one thousand pounds, provided that she first consults and has the approval of my wife

Eleanor, as to the manner in which the said money shall be expended."

Then, as if to show that despite this gentle sarcasm towards the cold-hearted daughter who had never forgiven him for his second marriage, and had so long alienated herself from her stepbrother and sister, he still bore her a parental affection, he added another clause (also with an unintended sting in it) to the effect that if Mrs Westonley should have issue, male or female, five thousand pounds was to be invested for her first child, to be paid upon coming of age, "also the like sum for the first child of my beloved and affectionate daughter, Mary Rayner."

"Poor Lizzie!" said Tom Gerrard to his brother-in-law, Westonley, after the contents of the will were made known, "she won't be pleased at this, I fear, Ted."

"She won't, Tom," replied Westonley frankly, as he placed his hand on Gerrard's shoulder with a kindly gesture, "but, between you and I, she has nothing to be angered at. I am pretty well in, and if I died to-morrow, she would be well provided for. And I don't think—I'm not disloyal to my wife—I don't think that she was quite as kind as she might have been to your mother and to you, and to poor Mary."

Of course the death of Mrs Gerrard simultaneously with that of her husband,

somewhat complicated matters, for she had made no will, and was evidently not aware of the nature of that made by Captain Gerrard; for she was of too gentle and kindly a nature to have permitted him to have written anything that could have aroused a feeling of resentment in the mind of his first-born child, although that child, from the day she returned from England had treated her with unconcealed hauteur and coldness.

At last, however, matters were finally settled, and Mrs Westonley, although she did resent most bitterly what she called her father's "wicked will," consented, at her husband's earnest request, to take charge of and educate Mary Rayner's orphan child.

"It will be a disgrace to us, Elizabeth, if we send the poor child to strangers," Westonley had said to her, almost sternly. "Tom, although he is a bachelor, would be overjoyed if we let her go to him."

"He is most unfitted to have the care of a child," said Mrs Westonley, icily; "from his conversation I should imagine he would be a most *decidedly* improper person."

"But he means well, you know; but, like your poor father, he's a bit too outspoken and rough. And . . . and Elizabeth, we have no children of our own, and you will get to love the poor little one."

"I will make no guarantee as to conferring my affections upon a child whose disposition may prove to be utterly unworthy of the tuition and Christian training I have undertaken to give her—at your request," was the acidulous reply.

Westonley groaned inwardly, but made no answer.

A few months after this conversation, Tom Gerrard made a short visit to Marumbah Downs to see Westonley and his dead sister's child. He had just returned from the little bay near Cape Howe, where the *Cassowary* had been castaway, and where his father, mother, and Dr Rayner had been buried, together with all the other passengers and members of the crew whose bodies had been washed ashore. After dinner, he, Westonley, and his step-sister, were discussing Captain Gerrard's will, when just then there came in a neighbour of Westonley's—a squatter named Brooke—who was one of the executors. Mrs Westonley received him rather coldly, and when Tom Gerrard began describing to him the situation of the place where his father and mother were interred, she listened with an ill-concealed impatience.

"Well! Mrs Westonley," said Brooke, stretching out his spurred and booted feet, "your father and mother died together—

as they lived, hand in hand, and heart to heart."

"The late Mrs Gerrard was *not* my mother."

There was a dead silence, and then Tom Gerrard rose, and looked his step-sister in the face with undisguised and bitter contempt.

"No, thank God! she was *not*, but she was *mine*, I am proud to say."

Then he held out his hand to Westonley, "Good-bye, Ted, I'm leaving."

"For heaven's sake, Tom! . . . Elizabeth, you forget yourself! Oh, I say, Brooke, don't let him go."

But Tom Gerrard, his heart aflame with anger, pushed Brooke and his brother-in-law aside, went to the stables, saddled his horse, and rode off to the Marumbah township, fifteen miles away, and next morning Westonley received a note.

"DEAR OLD TED,—You and I will always be the same old pals. I know you will be kind to Mary's little one, and will write to me from time to time, as I shall to you. But I can't forgive Lizzie. You will say I write in anger. *I do*. And yet I am a man quick to forgive an ordinary affront, even from a woman. You understand, old boy. TOM."

And so for many years, Tom Gerrard kept away from Marumbah, till his step-sister and Westonley wrote, and urged him to visit them.

CHAPTER III

BREAKFAST was served punctually at eight o'clock, and Tom Gerrard, whose equanimity was now quite restored, took his seat opposite his sister with a smiling face, and in a few minutes, under the sunshine of his genial manner, Mrs Westonley, much against her own inclination, began to thaw, and presently found herself chatting quite pleasantly with him.

"I've sprung myself on you two or three days before you expected me, Lizzie, but I'm sure you don't mind."

"Indeed no, Thomas. I am very glad. I wish Edward was here, but the mailman may bring me a letter from him this morning. He said in his last letter he would be sure to return home by Saturday, and to-day is Thursday. But what brought you here so quickly, Thomas?"

"Well, I was very lucky in getting a passage in one of the new Dutch mail steamers, instead of having to wait for the slow old *Eagle*, so I reached Melbourne a week earlier than I expected. Then at Melbourne I caught the

steamer for Port Albert, just as she was leaving. At Port Albert, instead of waiting two days for the coach for Marumbah, I bought a couple of horses, a gun, and some other gear, and came the ninety odd miles comfortably, instead of being shaken to pieces in one of Cobb's awful coaches."

"But what an unnecessary expense, Thomas. The two horses——"

"Oh! the whole thing, gun and all included, didn't run into fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds! Oh, Thomas! And your coach fare would have been but three pounds! You really are dreadfully extravagant."

"Not at all, Lizzie. I shall not lose much in the end. Ted will buy the horses, and all the gear from me. I think I can jew him into giving me something for them, even if it is only thirty quid."

"Thirty what?"

"Thirty quid—thirty pounds. Now my dear old Lizzie, don't pretend to be shocked at the word 'quid.' You know you've heard all the colonial expressions—and poor dad used them pretty frequently."

"Indeed he did, Thomas—too frequently, I'm afraid."

"Ah, well, Lizzie my dear, it doesn't matter now. By-the-way, doesn't little Mary break-fast with you?"

"Oh yes, usually; but this morning I told Janet to give her her breakfast in her bedroom, then after she has made herself presentable she can join us. I'm sure she and that dreadful boy Jim will get you to inspect their 'cubby house' down on the river bank in the course of the day. Sometimes Edward makes me quite cross by the way he yields to their stupid whims. He actually spent a whole day in helping them build their precious cubby house."

Gerrard laughed: "Good old Ted—just as much of a boy as he was twenty years ago! But who is this youngster Jim?"

"Oh, I quite forgot to tell you about him when we wrote to you. He is another of Edward's extravagances. You will remember that when the *Cassowary* was lost, the only survivors were one seaman and a child of four years of age. Well, about eight months ago, when Edward was travelling to Sydney in the *Balclutha*, he—as he always does—made the acquaintance of every seaman on board. One of them, a quartermaster, turned out to be the man who had been washed on shore from the *Cassowary*. Of course Edward was very much interested, and the man, whom he says is a very respectable steady person, told him that he had taken care of the child, who was his fellow-survivor. Well, the end of it was that Edward went to see the boy, and brought him

home with him. He *will* do those extraordinary things."

"Who were the boy's parents?"

"No one knows. Coll, the quartermaster, said that there were a great number of steerage passengers on board, and that he remembers seeing a young woman and her husband with this child, whom they called Jim, but what was their name was never ascertained. It was believed that they were newly-arrived emigrants, for no inquiries were made from any quarter about them, and so Coll, who seems to be a very kind man, took the child to his own home, although he has quite a large family, and actually did not want to part with him. Of course, Edward, as usual, went to extremes, and gave the Coll family fifty pounds."

"It was a generous action, Lizzie," said Gerrard gravely, "and shows him to be a good fellow—and a Christian."

Mrs Westonley looked at her step-brother in surprise. "But, Thomas, you don't seem to understand. These Coll people are really very poor—the father, I suppose, earns about seven pounds a month as quartermaster, and there are nine children. I think it was ridiculous of Edward giving them any money at all, considering the fact that he was lightening their cares by taking this boy, Jim, off their hands."

"Ah! Lizzie, we don't know. They may have been very fond of the kid—in fact they *must* have been, or they would not have kept him for six years, when they could have sent him to the Government Orphanage at Parramatta."

"I think that is what they should have done."

"No, you don't, Lizzie. You would not have let the youngster go into an Orphanage had you known of the matter. You have father's heart, Lizzie, under that pretty blouse of yours, although you pretend to be so cold, and put on the 'keep-off-the-style'—even to me."

"I'm not cold-hearted, Thomas."

Gerrard rose from his seat, and in another moment, Mrs Westonley found herself in his arms, and seated upon his knees.

"Now, look here Lizzie," and he kissed her, "I'm going to do my level best to please you, for you are my sister. I daresay I have done many things to displease you, but I love you, old woman, I do indeed. And whatever I may have said in the past I 'take back' as we bushmen say, and I want you to give me some of your affection. I know you have tons of it concealed under that prim little manner of yours, but you are too proud to show it. And see, Lizzie, old girl, I'm not

really the reckless scallawag you think me to be," and he stroked her hair, and looked so earnestly and pleadingly into her eyes, that her woman's heart triumphed, and she leant her head on his shoulder.

"I never thought you cared for me, Tom," she said "and I daresay that I have been to blame in many respects. Edward is one of the best husbands in the world, but he is careless and all but irreligious, and I cannot—I really cannot change my nature and be anything more than politely civil to the friends he sometimes brings here—they are rough, noisy and bucolic. I am always urging him to leave a manager at Marumbah and retire from squatting altogether. I do not like Australia, and wish to live in England, but he will not hear of it, although we have ample means to enable us to live in comfort, if not luxury."

Gerrard smiled as he gazed around the handsomely furnished room, and, mentally compared it with his own rough dining room on his station in the Far North.

"I should call this a pretty luxurious diggings, Lizzie," he said; "there are not many such houses as Marumbah Head Station in Australia."

His half-sister shrugged her shoulders. "You should see some of the country houses

in England, Thomas. And then another reason why I dislike bush life is the utter lack of female society."

Gerrard raised his brows. "Why, there are the three Gordon girls at Black River station, only ten miles away; they certainly struck me as being graceful, refined girls."

"Mrs Gordon is not a lady, and makes no secret of it. Her father was a fishcurer at Inverness, and before that a herring fisher."

"But she speaks, acts, and bears herself like a lady," protested Gerrard.

"It doesn't matter—she is not one. How Major Gordon, who comes from an old Scottish family, could marry her, I cannot understand. She was a nursery governess, or something like that."

"Yet Gordon seems a very happy man, and the girls——"

"The girls are all very well, although too horsey for me. I cannot tolerate young women bounding about all over the country after kangaroos, in company with a lot of rough men in shirts and moleskins, attending race meetings, and calling the Roman Catholic clergyman 'Father Jim' to his face. It's simply horrible."

"Well! what about Mrs Brooke and Ethel Brooke?" asked Gerrard; "surely they are ladies in every sense of the word?"

"I admit that they are better than the

Gordons, but Ethel Brooke is a notorious jilt, and her mother has absolutely no control of her ; then Mr Brooke himself is more like one of his own stockmen in appearance than a gentleman by birth and education."

Gerrard looked up at the ceiling—then gave up any further argument in despair. "I'll tell you what you want, Lizzie," he said, cheerfully, "you want about six months in Melbourne or Sydney."

"I detest Melbourne ; it is hot, dusty, dirty, noisy, and vulgar."

"Then Sydney?"

"Of course, I like Sydney ; but Edward never will stay there more than a week—he is always dying to be back among his cattle and horses."

"I'll try my hand with him, and see what I can do with the man," then he added,

"Now, let us get on with breakfast. Then we'll see this cubby house, and I'll diagnose the bear's complaint."

As soon as breakfast was over, Mrs Westonley left the room to put on her hat, and Gerrard stretched himself out in a squatter's chair on the verandah to smoke his pipe. Presently he heard his sister calling, "Jim, where are you? I want you."

"Yes, Mrs Westonley!" came the reply in a boyish treble, and the owner of it wondered

what made her voice sound so differently from its usual hard, sharp tone.

"Jim, come here and see my brother. He, you, and Mary, and I are all going down to the cubby house."

Suppressing a gasp of astonishment, the boy came to her to where Gerrard and she were now sitting.

"Thomas, this is Jim."

Gerrard jumped up and held out his hand.

"How are you, Jim? Glad to see you," and he smiled into the boy's sunburnt face. "By Jove! you are a big chap for a ten year old boy. What are you going to be—soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, eh?"

"I did want to be a sailor, sir; but now I'm going to be a stockman."

Gerrard smiled again, and surveyed the boy closely. He was rather tall for his age, but not weedy, with a broad sturdy chest, and his face was almost as deeply bronzed as that of Gerrard himself, and two big, honest brown eyes met his gaze steadily and respectfully; the squatter took a liking to him at once, as he had to his sister's child.

"Well, Jim, I'm going to stay here a week, and you'll have to tote me around, and keep me amused—see? You and Mary between you."

"Yes, sir."

"Any fish in Marumbah River?"

"Lots and lots—two kinds of bream, Murray cod, jew fish, and speckled trout, and awful big eels."

"Ha! that's good enough. Got fishing lines and hooks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then bring 'em along. Where is Mary, Lizzie?"

"Here she is," and Mrs Westonley brought her forward, the child's eyes dancing with pleasure; "she was too excited to eat any breakfast, until I insisted. Thomas, they'll worry you to death. You don't know them."

Gerrard threw his feet up in the air, like a boy, and rapped his heels together—"I'm fit for anything—from fishing to riding bull calves, or cutting out a wild bees' nest from a gum tree a mile high. Oh! we're going to have a high old time. I say, Mary, where's the invalid Bunny?"

"In the saddle-room."

"Then come along, and I'll prescribe for the poor, tailless gentleman," and he jumped to his feet. "We shall not be long, Lizzie—are you ready?"

"I shall be in ten minutes, Thomas," and the children looked wonderingly at her, for she actually smiled at them.

CHAPTER IV

A FEW days after the return of the owner of Marumbah Downs, he, with Gerrard and the black stockman, Toby, were camped on the bank of a creek about thirty miles from the head station. They had started out at daylight to muster some of the outlying cattle camps, and now after a hard day's riding were stretching themselves out upon the grassy bank to rest, whilst Toby was lighting the fire in readiness for supper. On the top of the bank the three hardy stockhorses and a packmare, were grazing contentedly on the rich green grass, and lying at Westonley's feet were two beautiful black-and-tan cattle dogs, still panting with their exertions. The camp had been made in a grove of mimosa trees, within a hundred yards of the clear waters of the creek, which rippled musically over its rocky bed as it sped swiftly to the sea. It wanted an hour to sunset, and already the hum of insects was in the air, and a faint cool breeze which had been stirring the green graceful fronds of the mimosas, and wafting fleecy strips of white across the blue dome above, had died away.

In the thick foliage of a cedar tree on the opposite bank, a pheasant and his mate were hopping about, uttering their harsh, rude notes ; then came a whir and whistle of wings and a quick passing shadow overhead as a flock of black duck sped over the tree tops to some sandy-banked, reed-margined pool near by.

Westonley, a big, bushy-bearded man, raised himself on one elbow, and watched them disappear ; then he called to Toby to take the gun and follow.

"What's the use of 'em, Ted?" said Gerrard, as pipe in mouth, and with hands clasped under his head, he gazed upwards to the sky. "There's two scrub turkeys in the saddle-bags ; don't be such a beastly glutton."

"You mind your own business, my little man. You like scrub turkey. I don't. Give me a black or a wood duck, freshly killed, before all scrub or 'plain' turkeys in Australia. And move yourself, you useless animal, and get one of your turkeys and pluck it while Toby is getting a duck or two. Wonderfully intelligent nigger is Toby. I've never yet known him to fail in getting me a duck if there was one within a mile. I say, Tommy, d'ye like crawfish? This creek here is full of 'em. We'll get some after supper."

"All right! I'm with you there," said Gerrard, as he pulled out two scrub turkeys

from the saddle-bags, and then seizing one by the legs, he took aim at the broad back of his friend, and the fat, heavy bird struck him fairly in the middle of it. The big man never moved, except to carelessly put his hand out behind, and taking the turkey, began to pluck it.

"Tommy," he said, presently, "d'ye know how to make crawfish soup? It's grand!"

"Can make it as well as you can, sonny," replied Gerrard, as he sat down and began plucking the other bird.

"Fearful lot of cubs at the 'Union' now in Sydney," said the older man, meditatively. "Hate going into the place. Met the two young Arlingtons there the other day, and asked 'em if they were going home to the station. 'No jolly fear,' said one of the cubs—they have just come back from college in England—'we've had enough of Portland Downs and bullock punching, branding, and all the rest of the beastly thing.' 'But you'll go and see your father?' I asked. 'Well, I don't think so, you know, Mr Westonley,' drawled the elder cub, 'it's a beastly long way, and takes such a devil of a time to get there—fourteen hundred miles by steamer is no joke, and we have to be back in England in five months. So the governor is coming down here to have a palaver with us.' It hurt me, Tom, to hear these two youngsters talking like

that, for Arlington is over seventy years of age. And they were good lads until he sent them to England to college with more money than was good for them. And it has done them harm—made cads of 'em," and he viciously tugged at the wing feathers of the bird he was plucking. "Your father used to say that Oxford and Cambridge turned out more good men, and more moneyed snobs into the world than all the other colleges in the universe."

"Daresay," said Tom Gerrard, carelessly, as he began a surgical operation on his turkey. "I have heard my father say that old Arlington, who was one of the best of the old time squatters, made a mistake in sending those two boys home with unlimited money and credit. I suppose they'll turn out rotters."

"Most likely. And Arlington—by thunder, can't that old fellow of seventy ride through scrub—thinks that they will take his place on Portland Downs when he dies, and be a credit to the colony. *I* wouldn't have 'em on Marumbah as jackeroos, at a pound a week. But yet there is good stuff in them, Tom, and good English blood—the best in the world. Hallo! this turkey has eggs; just the very thing for the crawfish soup to-morrow."

Presently two shots rang out in quick succession.

"Toby has got on to 'em," said Westonley ;
"how do you cook black duck, freshly-killed,
sonny, when you're camping out?"

"Grill 'em."

"The whole carcass?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have degrading, greedy
customs up in Queensland. Why, the only
part—but there, I'll show you presently when
Toby comes back. Tommy!"

"Yes."

"This sort of thing is all right, isn't it?"
and the big man waved his great arm vaguely
around his head.

"Yes, it's as fine a bit of country as there is
anywhere in Australia," replied the younger
man, who knew how devoted his companion was
to Marumbah. "In fact it is all good country
on Marumbah. I wish my run was half as
good. Still I've nothing to grumble at. There
are five thousand cattle on Ocho Rios now, and
it will carry another two thousand easily."

Presently Toby appeared carrying three
ducks, which he handed to his master, who felt
them approvingly. "They're all right, Toby.
Go and look to your fire. Now, Tom, my son,
I'll show you the only way to fix up a black
duck quickly, and correctly as well." Plucking
the thick coating of feathers off the underneath
half of a bird from the lower part of the neck

down, he made a deep, sweeping curve with his sheath knife, removed the entire breast denuded of plumage, and then threw the rest to the dogs. A second bird was done the same way, and the two portions were then skewered through with a piece of hard, green wood, sprinkled with salt, and handed to the black boy, who soon had them frizzling merrily over a glowing fire.

Gerrard nodded approval. "Quick, but wasteful, old man. You would never do for a cook in a well-regulated household." Then cutting off a large piece of the turkey, he skewered it in the same manner, and hung up the rest for Toby to eat.

Night came swiftly, and, as the two friends ate their supper, and drank their strong "billy" tea, the stars came out, and the heavy dew began to fall upon the grass. Spreading their blankets under the mimosas, they lit their pipes, and with their saddles for pillows, began to discuss various matters—the past day's work, the price of fat cattle in Melbourne, the late drought in South Australia, and such other all-important subjects to Australian pastoralists.

Then Gerrard, after describing some of his experiences and troubles with the wild blacks on Cape York Peninsula where his station, "Ocho Rios," was situated, said:

"By the way, Ted. That was a curious

thing that you should come across that youngster Jimmy, just through having a yarn with a sailor on board the *Balclutha*."

"Very curious ; no—it's something more than that Tom. It was as if the Power above had directed it. This man Coll was one of the quartermasters, and only mentioned the *Cassowary* in the most casual manner to me as we were passing the place where she went ashore. 'I was in her, sir,' he said in the most simple, matter-of-fact manner, 'and me and a poor little boy about four, was the only ones as was saved.'

"'Good heavens!' I said, 'you are the one man in the world I wanted particularly to meet. I went especially to Sydney, but could not find any trace of you except your name in the shipping office where you had been on the *Cassowary* as an A.B. And I advertised in all the Australian papers for you and the boy, but you seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth.'

"'It's very easy to explain, sir,' he said. 'As soon as I got to Sydney, I went to the Sailors' Home, taking the boy with me. There was hundreds of people wanted to take him, but I was too fond of the kid to give him up to anyone. I suppose it was wrong of me, seeing as I have a big family of my own, which was then living at Newcastle. But I knew the old

woman wouldn't make too many bones about another mouth to feed.'

"Then he went on to say that being afraid the boy would be taken from him by some of the many people who wanted to adopt him, he slipped away with him one night from the Sailors' Home, and took him on board a collier schooner, whose captain he knew, and who was leaving Sydney on the following morning for Wellington, New Zealand. The skipper of the vessel consented to take Jimmy away with him, and then bring him to Newcastle on the return voyage—the collier belonged to, and always loaded at Newcastle—and hand him over to Mrs Coll. This was done, and in a few months, although Coll was continually asked by people what had become of the youngster, he always told the same story—the boy had been adopted by a family with plenty of money, whose name he was not at liberty to reveal, etc.

"Then, of course, I told him that I was the son-in-law of Captain Gerrard, whom he remembered perfectly well, as also your mother and poor Rayner. We had quite a long talk, and in the end I succeeded in wresting a promise from him that if 'the old woman' was agreeable to parting with Jimmy, he would also consent.

"I went to Newcastle with him and saw his

wife, who brought the boy to me. He was quite decently dressed, and got into my heart right away. . . And I thought that Lizzie would like him too." His voice dropped, and he ceased speaking for a few minutes.

"Well, I had a hard struggle to induce the worthy woman to give him up, but in the end she consented. Then I talked about little Mary, and how happy the two would be together, and that it would not be natural for two children who had been rendered orphans by the same dreadful calamity to be separated. The poor creature's face was streaming with tears when she at last consented. 'It's no for the sake o' the money I pairt wi' the bairn. It's little he costs me, an' my own children will be sore at heart for many a lang day after he goes!' . . But she recognised that it would be wrong of her to refuse—and so the matter was fixed up."

"Good old Ted!"

"Well—keep this dark from Lizzie, old man—I gave 'em a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds."

Gerrard's clear laugh. "Poor Lizzie! She thinks you gave them fifty pounds only."

"Just so, just so—you see, old man, Lizzie isn't a bit mean—and she doesn't know that I am as well in as I am, so I told her a fifth of the truth. I said that fifty pounds was a great help to a hard-working man with a large family."

"Cunning beggar!"

"Then, as Coll struck me as being a downright, straightforward man, who had a pretty stiff pull of it to bring up and educate his children decently on seven pounds a month—seaman's wages.—I got him a berth as wharfinger to a steamship company at twelve pounds, and he was made as happy as a sand-boy, I can tell you: Lizzie knows that much, for I told her. And she lets the youngster write to the Colls now and then."

"Does she?" said Gerrard, dryly. He could not help it. Then he sat up, and re-filled his pipe.

"Ted, old chap, I like that youngster. Let me have him and take him to Ocho Rios with me. I want little Mary most, but know you won't part with her, and even if you would, a cattle station in the Far North is no place for a girl. But let me have the boy. I'll be good to him."

Westonley made no answer at first. Then he said slowly, "I'll tell you in the morning, Tom. Good-night."

CHAPTER V

Soon after sunrise, as the two friends were drinking their morning tea ere they started back for Marumbah, Westonley told Gerrard that he had decided to let him take Jim away with him to Ocho Rios.

"He is provided for in my will, Tom, but you must never let him know it. I think it is a mistake to let youngsters know that they will have money left to them some day."

"Quite so, Ted. And I am sure that you will never regret letting me have him, and I will bring him up as if he were my own son. There is no school within two hundred miles of Ocho Rios, but I think I am quite capable of giving him a decent education."

"Little Mary won't like it, Tom. She is passionately fond of him, and will cut up very rough over the parting, I fear."

"Poor child! But, of course, she will see him again in a few years. I can see, that next to you, Jim is her 'dearest and best.' If I were a married man, Ted, I would ask you for her as well. Every time she looks

at me with those big, soft eyes of hers, I see poor Mary again, and when she speaks, hear the soft sweet voice again."

"She is a lovable child, and, look here, Tom, old man, I'll tell you something that has made me grizzle in secret for many years—Lizzie doesn't care for her. I don't mind her being a bit sharp with the boy now and then, for he's a terrible young Turk at times, and I'm too easy with him; but little Mary is such a gentle, soft sort of kid, that I wonder how anyone could possibly help loving her. But, somehow or other, Lizzie doesn't. Still, within the last few days—ever since you came in fact—she has been a bit warmer in her manner."

Gerrard nodded. "Lizzie will come round to like her in time, Ted. And, I say, old fellow, since you have been so open with me, I'm going to say something to you that you perhaps may not like, and think I'm an interfering ass. But, 'honest Injun,' Ted, I mean well—like a good many other idiots do when they meddle with other people's domestic affairs."

"Go on, sonny," said the big man, quietly, "you never talk rot."

"Well, it's this. Lizzie is simply fretting her life out at Marumbah, and I think that, in a way, you are to blame. She does not

like living in the bush, and does not seem to care for the people hereabout. I had quite a long yarn with her the first day I came to Marumbah, and although at first she tried to be the stiff, austere lady with me, I wouldn't have it. Made her sit on my knee, and all that, you know, stroked her hair, and pinched her pretty little nose."

"Tom, if I didn't know you better, I would call you a liar."

"Fact! You know as well as I do that she has always looked upon me as a black sheep. But she is going to change her mind about me, and I'll bet you a fiver that before I leave Marumbah, I'm going to be 'Tommy' to her, as I was in the old, old days."

Westonley's sun-tanned face flushed with pleasure. "Tom, I'd give half of all I'm worth to see her and you friends again. I know how bitterly she affronted you years ago."

"Oh! that is all forgotten, old son. I was to blame for going off in such a silly huff. I behaved like a bear. We men don't understand women, Ted, and make hideous fools of ourselves. And that brings me to what I wanted to tell you—which is, that you are a blazing idiot."

"Tom, whatever you say, and whatever cheek you give me, I will take it quietly, although I could knock you out in four rounds,"

and Westonley thumped Gerrard affectionately on his back with his great hand. "Now, I know I'm a thundering ass but I'll be as meek as a lamb to you, you black-faced, under-sized little beggar."

Gerrard laughed. There was a difference of four inches in their respective heights; Westonley being six feet two inches. He knew by the inflection of the big man's voice that he had become a much happier man within the last ten minutes, and the knowledge of it gave him a great satisfaction.

"I may not be as big as you," he said, "but if I was the same shape, I'd go to a bush carpenter, and get him to trim me down with an adze." Then after this jest, he resumed seriously. "Well, Ted, it is just this. Lizzie says that she likes Sydney but you do not, and that you will never stay there for more than a week at a time. Now, that isn't doing the square thing by her. You and I as well, never think that the many years she spent in England gave her a taste for many of the refinements of civilisation—pictures, high-class music, especially Churchy music, and all kind of things like that, which are always dear to a highly-educated and naturally clever woman. Now, when she married you, and settled down to a station life, she gave up a good deal, and as the years go on, she feels it more and more,

and no woman in the world can always be an angel, you know, although we tell 'em so when we ask 'em to marry us. Do you follow me?"

"I'm listening for all I'm worth, my son. If we were in a room, you could distinctly hear the wall paper adhering to the wall."

"Well, now, as I was saying, that isn't fair to Lizzie. What is the use of her going to Sydney for a week? Just as she is beginning to enjoy herself, and feel something of the life she had in England, you drag her back to Marumbah to your beastly bullock punching."

"But I don't want her to come, Tom. I've always urged her to stay there for three months—or six, if she liked."

"Bosh! What pleasure would she have in being there alone; for although a woman may have lots of women friends, she's practically alone if her husband isn't with her. Tumble?"

Westonley nodded. "Go on, Tommy, go on to a dead finish. I am beginning to see I'm in fault."

"Of course you are. And if you don't give her a long change in Sydney, and stay there with her, you'll feel sorry for it; she'll become a religious monomaniac, and go in for High Church, auricular confession, and an empty stomach on Fridays. She's got a turn that way, remember. A conventual education in a High Church school in England isn't a very

healthy preparation for a girl who afterwards marries a hulking, horse-racing, hard-riding Australian squatter."

"What am I to do?" asked Westonley.

"Take her to Sydney next week. We'll all go together, little Mary included, and I'll stay with you for a couple of months. I'll stand half the racket."

"Shut up! Do you think I can't run Lizzie, little Mary, and myself without you chipping in?"

"All right!" and Gerrard, secretly delighted, but showing no sign of it, went on placidly: "you see, Ted, you have a good man in Black" (head stockman at Marumbah). "What he doesn't know about cattle isn't worth knowing, and there's no need for you to come tearing back for mustering, and branding, and attending to things generally. D'ye think that if you died to-morrow the cattle would go into mourning, and would refuse 'to increase and multiply'? No one in this world is indispensable, although everyone thinks he is, and that, when he pegs out, the Universe is going to fall into serious trouble. Now, that's all I have to say. Are you satisfied I'm talking sense?"

"Sonny, it's all right. I'll do any blessed thing you want, although I hate the idea of leaving Marumbah to loaf about in Sydney for six months," and the big man gripped Gerrard

by his pointed beard, and tugged it affectionately. "I can see that I have thought too much of myself and too little of others."

"Not a bit; you were only thinking of Marumbah. Ted, old man, I think I'll come back next year, and we'll see the Melbourne Cup together, hey?"

"It's a deal! If you don't come, I'll——"

"Kick me when I do come. Time we were off home, fatty."

.
Just about midnight, as Gerrard lay on his bed reading, he heard a low sound of sobbing from little Mary's room, which adjourned his own. He rose quietly, stepped to her door, and gently opened it.

The child was in her nightdress, leaning out of the window, with her hands outstretched to the night.

"Oh Jim, Jim, dear Jim! I wish Uncle Tom had never come to Marumbah. He must be a godless and wicked man to take you away from me when I love you. I hate him, I hate him!"

Gerrard went back to his room, lit his pipe and walked out on to the verandah, and paced slowly up and down, thinking.

"I wish I had 'em both," he said to himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE charming little town of Bowen, on the shores of the beautiful harbour named Port Denison, was in the zenith of its glory and prosperity. There were certainly other towns in the north of Queensland — Mackay for instance — which enjoyed the advantage of being nearer the capital, and so obtaining more consideration from the Treasury; but Bowen, although six hundred miles from Brisbane, was the most thriving town in the north, and affected a haughty indifference to her rivals for supremacy, such as the “sugar” growing towns of Bundaberg and Mackay to the south, and the vulgar, upstart, and newly-founded Townsville to the north.

“With our matchless harbour, surpassed only on this island continent by that of Sydney,” said the Port Denison *Clarion*, in one of its inspired and lofty-languaged leaders, “we can regard with a serene, yet not discourteous or contemptuous indifference, the statements of our esteemed, though hasty contemporary, the Mackay *Planters’ Friend*, that Bowen may yet find that the newly-founded hamlet of Townsville on the shores of Cleveland Bay will ere

long usurp the claim of beautiful Bowen to be the natural *entrepôt* for all that vast extent of territory to the northward and the westward of Port Denison, and which, ere many decades have passed, will, through its marvellous agricultural, pastoral, and auriferous resources, add not a jewel but a corruscation of blazing and lustrous gems of the most priceless value to the already glorious crown of that noble lady upon whose Empire the sun never sets. Townsville is simply a collection of humpies and shanties built upon an ill-smelling mud bank. We have personally satisfied ourselves that unless some enterprising British capitalist can convert the only available possession of Townsville (which is mud, and bad mud at that) into bricks, which, perhaps, may be used for the minor classes of buildings which must of necessity soon be built for the accommodation of the poorer classes of working men who, in their thousands, will soon be established in Bowen, Townsville will no more prove a factor towards the development of this great country of North Queensland than the numerous alligators in the Burdekin River will be employed by the municipality of Bowen as paid scavengers, and be provided brass badges, dust shovels, and other such implements to denote their vocation. As for the other assertions of the editor of the *Planters' Friend*, we, with all kindliness, should like to point out that the *Friend* is the organ of the Sugar Planters; it sees nothing beyond Sugar; Sugar is its God, its Mokanna, and (incidentally) we may remark that Rum is a product resulting from the manufacture of the saccharine plant, and we fear that many samples of this aromatic liquid may have found their way into the editorial sanctum of our

esteemed and valued contemporary in Mackay. At least, we judge so when a dirty, ill-smelling mud bank is compared with one of the most noble evidences of God's handiwork—Port Denison!"

To such a courteous reproof as this, the *Planters' Friend* would invariably make the same reply in the form of a leaderette of ten or twenty lines, enclosed in a square of black to denote mourning :

"Our esteemed Bowen contemporary has 'got 'em' again. We are sorry we cannot do any more than again, in the most kindly spirit, urge him to try the Dr Jordan cure, an advertisement of which will be found on page 3. We have personal knowledge of a case of the rescue from utter wreck and degradation of one of the brightest intellects of the present century by the use of the Jordan system; and as the price is but trifling, it should be within easy access of our squatter-adoring contemporary."

To these vaguely-worded, funereal-encompassed remarks, the *Clarion* would retort :

"No one who believes in the trite but, nevertheless, all-powerfully true assertion that the Press is the

Archimidean lever which moves the world, cannot but regret the unblushing statement of the editor of our esteemed contemporary, the *Planters' Friend*, that he has been the victim of a soul-destroying, home-wrecking, and accursed habit, which that gifted American, Colonel Robert Ingersoll, has, in words of fiery eloquence, called 'the treacherous, insidious murderer of home and happiness; the Will-o'-the-Wisp that draws honour, genius, and all that is good into its fatal, deadly quagmire.' To the assertion that our valued contemporary is 'the possessor of one of the brightest intellects of the present century' (as he so modestly informs us) we do not cavil at for one moment. But even the patients under the Jordan (American quack) system may have relapses; and, when the *Planters' Friend* can calmly publish two columns of leaded matter insinuating that a mud bank on the shores of Cleveland Bay is to become the leading port of North Queensland, we can but regretfully infer that the Jordan cure is not entirely satisfactory, and that even the 'brightest intellects' suffer terrible and deplorable relapses."

These journalistic amenities were accorded serious attention by the society of Bowen, which, by reason of the many Government officials established there, considered itself very exclusive. The majority of these officials were connected with the law, for Bowen was the proud possessor of not only a resident judge, but also a new courthouse of such ample dimensions that the whole population of the town could have been

accommodated therein. How the numerous barristers, solicitors, and the smaller legal fry lived was a mystery. Perhaps, like the mythical French town whose population supported themselves by doing each other's washing, the legal gentry of Bowen existed by performing each other's clerical work. Next in numbers — though not in social standing — were the Government officials connected with the Harbour and Lights Department, and "The Jetty." The Jetty was one of Bowen's triumphs; was over a quarter of a mile long, cost twenty thousand pounds to build, and was costing four thousand pounds a year to keep in order, and enable the staff of engineers, inspectors, etc., to dress in a gentlemanly style, and maintain their prestige as officials of higher importance than the Customs officers, of whom Bowen was provided with six, all dressed very becomingly, and all more or less related to members of the Queensland Cabinet—as a matter of fact it would have been a difficult task to find any male person in the Government service in Bowen—from His Honour Judge Coker to Paddy Shea, the letter-carrier, who was not connected with, or did not owe his position to a member of the Ministry. And Bowen revelled in the knowledge that Brisbane and the Legislature

dared not refuse Bowen any reasonable request, for already there was a dark rumour concerning Separation—the division of the colony into North and South—and the *Clarion* had warned the “inert and muddling Government” of the colony “that unless the just and courteous request of the telegraphic staff of the Bowen Repeating Office for a punkah is acceded to without further circumlocution, the growing movement in favour of Separation will be openly advocated by this journal. Already (of this we have private knowledge) has Lord Kimberley expressed himself astonished at the heartless refusal of our benighted Colonial Secretary and Treasurer to grant the insignificant sum of two hundred pounds to the necessitous widow of Samuel Wilson, who was killed by being run over by a trolley on our beautiful jetty. Does the Colonial Secretary know the meaning of the word NEMESIS? Let him ponder!”

The appearance of Bowen at this time of latent agitation for Separation and open and undisguised animosity to the “upstart collection of humpies on a mud bank in Cleveland Bay,” was pleasing in the extreme. Wide, tree-planted, grassy streets, kept scrupulously clean, handsomely-built bungalows, enclosed in gardens containing tropical and sub-tropical plants (the residences of the officials and

their families), a court-house and other public buildings of such size and ornate construction that they surpassed those of any other town in the colony, except the capital; an environment of back country grateful to look upon, and a harbour of surpassing beauty.

The editor of the *Clarion*, despite his inflated leaders, was a thoroughly sensible man, who fully recognised the potentialities of the port, and yet saw that it was doomed to sink into comparative insignificance, and that the "collection of humpies on a mud bank" was to be the future capital of the Far North. But he struggled on gamely. He was a genial, merry-hearted old bachelor, who had once loved his paper as a mother loves her one child, and had spent his capital of two thousand pounds in trying to keep the town alive as long as possible. A refined, highly-educated man, he was obliged—after two years' bitter financial experience—to resort to the type of journalism prevalent amongst Australian country newspapers; otherwise he could not have made a living. But he despised the very people for whom he was apparently fighting so strenuously, and often savagely reproached himself for having turned aside from the straight path.

"Thank Heaven, I'm not married!" he said to himself one evening, as throwing himself

down upon a couch in his bedroom at the Queen's Hotel, he began to glance through a bundle of exchanges which he had brought from the office, and in a few minutes a smile spread over his face, as he read the following in the Rockhampton *Bulletin* :

"The Bowen *Clarion* is making a game effort to bolster up that little tin-pot town-ship with its *coterie* of highly-paid, useless officials, who for six years past have battered on the public revenues. It was the misfortune of a representative of this journal to be obliged to spend two weeks in Port Denison not long since, and his terse description of the spot and its inhabitants deserves a place in the guide book of the colony which has yet to be written. Bowen is a delightfully laid-out town on the shores of Port Denison. It is inhabited by some six hundred people—mostly official loafers and spongers of the worst type. The community consists of boozy squatters, snobbish wives of snobbish officials, anæmic old maids, obsequious tradesmen on the verge of insolvency, and two respectable and hard-working persons—the latter are Chinamen. The 'tony' society of Bowen is about as lively and intelligent as that of a decaying Cathedral town in the old country. The atmosphere of matchless snobbery and vulgarity that pervades Bowen can be perceived by the passing voyager many miles out at sea."

"By Jove! he's not far wrong," commented the editor, as putting down the paper he took up another, and had just ripped off the the cover, when the chambermaid tapped at the door, then entered with a card.

"The gentleman wishes to see you particularly, sir."

He took the card from the tray, and read,

THOMAS GERRARD.

OCHO RIOS.

beneath was written, "Urgently desires to see the editor of the *Clarion* on business of importance."

"Ask him to come in, Milly," he said as he kicked a chair into position.

CHAPTER VII.

"How do you do, Mr Gerrard?" he said, as with outstretched hand he met his visitor at the door. "I am glad to meet Ted Westonley's brother-in-law at last. How is he?"

"Very well, indeed, when I last saw him," replied Gerrard, as he sat down, and Lacey rang the bell.

"I have not seen him for ten years," said the editor. "Ah, here you are, Milly! What will you take, Mr Gerrard? You must excuse my rig" (he was in his pyjamas); "but it's so infernally hot that I always get into these the minute I'm back in my room. When did you arrive?"

"Only an hour ago, in the *Tinonee*."

"Going back to your station, I suppose? By the way, aren't you—or is it Jardine?—who is the 'furthest north' cattle man?"

"Jardine; but his station is on the east side. I'm on the west; the Gulf side, between the Batavia River and Duyfhen Point."

Lacey looked admiringly at the well-knit figure and handsome, tanned face of his visitor. "Well, the climate up there can't be as bad

as it is painted. I never saw a man look better than you do."

"Oh! the climate doesn't hurt me now. I've had my share of fever of course; so has everyone on Ocho Rios. The niggers are our chief trouble."

"Ah! no doubt. By the way, Aulain, of the Black Police is down here on sick leave. He'll be glad to see you."

"And I him. He's a fine fellow, isn't he?"

"A whiter man—or a better gentleman—never put foot in a stirrup. I've got to like him very much. And he thinks no end of you. Says you're the best scrub rider he ever saw."

Gerrard laughed. "'Praise from him is praise indeed.' All I can say is that I have never seen anyone who can go through scrub or thick timber like Randolph Aulain. Where is he staying?"

"Here—at the Queen's. He's had a terrible time with fever, and can't do more than sit up. We'll go and see him presently."

'Oh, yes! But I want to speak to you on a matter of some importance first. That is why I have ventured to come to your hotel. I did go to the *Clarion* office, but just missed you."

"I'm only too delighted to see you, even if you were not Westonley's brother-in-law. You know that he and I were at Rugby

together, and then at Oxford? But, before I say anything else, when does your steamer leave?"

"This afternoon at four o'clock; but I am not going on in her. I'm in somewhat of a hole, and I felt sure you would assist me."

"Indeed I will. I'm not flush. This blessed rag of mine doesn't pay, but I can raise a hundred from the bank here."

Gerrard laughed. "No, not that, Mr Lacey. I'm not 'broke,' and it is not money I want. At the same time I appreciate your generosity. Ted has often told me you would do any mortal thing for a friend in need." He paused, and then began, "Mr Lacey——"

"Drop the 'Mr' please."

"Well, then, Lacey, I want your advice and assistance. Do you know any decent family here who would take care of a boy of eleven years of age for about a fortnight?"

The editor of the *Clarion* tugged thoughtfully at his long, white moustache for a few moments. "Yes, I think I do know of such a family. I used to board with them when I first came to this infernal hole. Their name is Woodfall. The father is a dairyman here, and a very decent hard-working man. His wife is a thoroughly, good honest woman, and they have no children. I think they would be suitable people; and I'm sure would look after the boy very well. Where is he?"

"On board the steamer, just now, waiting for me. I'll tell you how I'm fixed. The youngster is an orphan who was living with my brother-in-law at Marumbah. I took a great fancy to him, and as my sister did not care much for the young 'un, though Ted did, I persuaded Ted to let me have him to 'father.' I should have liked to have had my poor sister Mary's little girl—you know that my sister died soon after her husband and my father and mother all went together in the *Cassowary*—but, of course, I couldn't bring her away from civilisation—there's no white woman within two hundred miles of Ocho Rios." Then he went on telling his host the history of Jim, from the time Westonley had brought him away from Newcastle to the present. Lacey listened with interest.

"Well, a few weeks ago in Sydney I met a Mrs Tallis, a widow. Her husband was a squatter, and died a few months ago in Sydney."

"I knew him. His station is called Kaburie—it is between here and Mackay—and is a rattling good cattle run."

"Yes. She wants to sell it. I suppose the poor little woman doesn't like going back to the place now. However now I'm coming to the point. I've an idea that it might suit me as a breeding station, and told her I would

stop at Bowen, and go and look at it. Now it would suit me very well if I could leave my *protégé* here for a couple of weeks, as the young scamp has managed to sprain his wrist on board, and so can't very well come with me, though I should like to take him very much."

"The Woodfalls will take him, I'm sure. And I will look after him as well. Now, will you come and see Aulain for a few minutes? Then I'll take you up to Mrs Woodfall."

Aulain, a strikingly handsome, slightly-built, olive-faced man, with jet-black beard and moustache, was delighted to see Gerrard.

"Hallo! old 'Tom-and-Jerry,' I'm glad to see you again. Sit down and tell me o' the wondrous sights o' Sydney and Melbourne. Heavens, man, I wish I could get away down South for six months."

They remained talking for half an hour, during which time Gerrard told Aulain the reason of his stopping at Bowen.

"By Jove! old fellow, I shall be glad if you buy Kaburie, for you'll have to put in some of your time there, of course, and I've applied for a removal from the Cape York District to Port Denison. I'm sick to death of nigger chasing in the Far North, and want to be somewhere where I can feel I'm not entirely an outcast from the world, with no one to talk to but my own black troopers, any one of

whom would put a bullet into my back if I turned rusty."

"Oh, well, I think it is pretty certain I shall buy Mrs Tallis's station. I like Ocho Rios very well, but now, since this last trip of mine South, I feel as you do—I want to be a little less out of the world. I might, perhaps, sell Ocho Rios, and fix myself at Kaburie. If I don't, I'll put a manager there, and keep the place going, for I have a great belief that there will be some rich gold discoveries in the Batavia River country before long—and thousands of meat-hungry diggers means pots of money to a cattleman."

"I'm certain, too, that there will be some big fields opened up that way soon," said Aulain. "In that valise of mine, there under the bed, are three or four ounces of alluvial gold which my troopers and I washed out in one day at the head of a little creek running into the Batavia."

"Place with a hunking big boulder standing up in the middle of a deep pool, with a lot of fish in it?" queried Gerrard.

"Yes; but how the deuce did you come across it? I've never seen a beast of yours within fifty miles of it—the country is too rough even for cattle—and I thought that my troopers and I were the first that ever saw the place."

"When were you there?"

"About a month after you left Ocho Rios for Sydney."

"Well, my dear little laddie, I was there a year ago, camped there for a couple of days, and did a little washing out—with two quart billy cans for a dish."

"Get anything?"

"Seven ounces, sonny; mostly in coarse gold too."

Aulain whistled. "And you never went back there?"

"No! I never had the time for one thing; another reason was that it would not have paid me to have left my station for the sake of a few hundred pounds' worth of gold, and thirdly, although I know a little about alluvial mining, I don't know anything about reefing—wouldn't know a gold-bearing reef from a rank duffer, unless I saw the gold sticking up in it in lumps. And there are several parties of prospectors up in Cape York Peninsula now, and some of them are sure to make their way to the Batavia River country in the course of time. If any come to my place I'll give them all the help I can. I'd like to see a really good gold-field discovered near Ocho Rios; it would mean thousands of pounds to me."

"Of course it would. But, I say, Gerry, old fellow," and here Aulain paused. "Will

you do me a favour? Oh, no, hang it!" and he stopped suddenly.

"What is it, Aulain?"

The Inspector's sallow face flushed. "I don't think it is fair to ask you, as it will perhaps affect your interests."

"Don't be an ass! What is it?"

Lacey rose, thinking that Aulain hesitated to speak on account of him being present, but Aulain begged him to stay, and then said:

"Well, I'll tell you what it is, Gerry. Will you keep it dark about that little creek up there; for six months anyway."

"Certainly, I will."

"You see, Gerry, it's this way. I'm sick to death of life in the Black Police, and as soon as I get over this fever, I think I'll resign and try my luck at mining. I can't live on my salary, and I have no backstair's influence in Brisbane to get me anything better in the Government service; and only this morning I was thinking of that very place where we both got gold. There are reefs all about the head of that creek, and every one of them carries payable gold. And so if you will keep it dark I stand a good chance of not only getting the usual Government reward of five thousand pounds for the discovery of a payable gold-field, but can peg out my reward claim beforehand."

"My dear old chap, I shall be only too pleased. And, look here, why not send in your resignation right away, and then after I've finished this business at Kaburie, come away with me. There will be a steamer here in a fortnight, which will take us to Somerset, and from there we can get to Ocho Rios in one of the pearling luggers. We shall find plenty of them lying up at Somerset at this time of the year, and it will be a better and easier way of getting to my place than having to buy horses at Somerset, and travelling a hundred and fifty miles across the peninsula."

Aulain shook his head. "It is a very tempting offer, Gerry ; but I can't accept it. I am obliged to wait six months after sending in my resignation before I can leave the service ; it is a hard and fast rule."

"I'm awfully sorry, Aulain," said Gerrard ; "however, when you do come, you will, of course, make my place your headquarters. Don't buy any horses when you get to Somerset ; I can lend you all you want. Now I must be off with Lacey. I'll see you when I get back from Kaburie in a week or ten days, and we'll have long yarns together, as I shall remain in Bowen until the next steamer for Somerset calls."

"Right! Oh, by-the-way, Gerry, on your way to Kaburie you will have to pass a little

mining camp called Fraser's Gully. Will you leave a letter there for me? I'll have it written by the time you come back from Woodfalls."

As soon as Lacey and Gerrard were out in the street, the latter returned to his companion with a smile. "So you are to play Mercury for Aulain?"

"Am I? Who is she?"

"A Miss Kate Fraser. Her father is a friend of mine, and Aulain and she are engaged—at least I think so. But I have heard that there is a parson in the running, and I don't wonder—for she is a splendid girl."

A walk of a mile brought them to Woodfall's house. Both Woodfall and his wife were at home, and Lacey at once entered into the subject of Jim.

"Certainly, Mr Gerrard, we'll take the boy and be glad to have him. But we won't take payment," said Mrs Woodfall, a big-shouldered woman with a pleasant, sunburnt face. "Joe, get the buggy, and I'll drive down to the steamer at once with Mr Gerrard."

Two hours later, Jim was installed at the Woodfall's, and Gerrard was on his way to Kaburie.

CHAPTER VIII

ALONG one of the many densely-wooded spurs of Cape Conway, which rears its bold front from out the pale green waters of Repulse Bay, a young girl was riding a wild-eyed, long-maned and sweating bay filly, which, newly broken in, had been making the most frantic efforts to unseat its rider, whose dark brown hair, escaping from under the light Panama hat she wore, had fallen down upon her shoulders.

At the summit of the spur there was an open grassy space, free of timber, and commanding a view seaward, and along the coast north and south for many miles. Here the girl drew rein and dismounted, deftly whipped her hair into a loose coil, quickly took off the saddle, placed it, seat down, upon the ground so that it might dry under the hot sun, and then slipping the bit from the horse's mouth, let the animal graze with loose bridle.

"There, my fractious young lady," she said, "you can feed, and as you feed, I hope you will consider the error of your ways, and give up any more attempts to buck me off. You ought to know me better by this time."

From a leather saddle-bag she took out some slices of beef and damper, and leisurely began to eat, her dark brown eyes dreamily scanning the blue sea before her, and then resting on the green, verdured hills of Whitsunday Island, away to the northward, with little beaches of shining white nestling at the heads of many a quiet bay, whose shores were untrodden, except by the feet of the black and savage aborigines inhabiting the mainland. Far out to sea, and between Whitsunday Passage and the Great Barrier Reef, the white sails of five pearling luggers were glinting in the sun as they sailed northward to the scene of their labours in the wild waters of New Guinea and Torres Straits.

"I wonder how many of those on board will return," mused the girl aloud as she watched the little vessels—which looked no larger than swans. "How many will come back rich, how many disappointed and yet not undaunted, ever hopeful, ever daring, ever eager to sail once more, and face danger and death; death day by day and night by night for two long weary years. And yet—oh, I wish I were a man. I believe I am a man—a man in heart and will and strength of mind and body, and yet a woman. And for father's sake I ought to have been born a boy." She sighed, and leaning her chin on her hand gazed longingly

at the tiny fleet and wished she—a man—were at the tiller of one of the luggers, listening to the tales of the bronze-faced, bearded pearl-shellers; tales of mighty pearls worth thousands of pounds, of fierce encounters with the treacherous savages of New Guinea, and the mainland of Australia; of fearful hurricanes and dreadful dangers ashore and afloat, and then peaceful, happy days of rest in the far-away isles of Eastern Polynesia; before the newly-discovered beds of pearl shell in Torres Straits lured them away from the calm seas and palm-clad atolls of the Paumotus and Manahiki and Tongarewa.

The grazing filly suddenly raised her shapely head and pricked up her ears, and listened; and, in an instant, the girl sprang up and took a Smith and Wesson revolver from her saddle. The blacks about Repulse Bay and Whitsunday Passage had an evil reputation, and many an unfortunate stockman or digger had been slaughtered by them when camped in apparent security; even within a few score miles of such towns as Bowen and Mackay.

With the filly she listened, and then smiled as she heard the sound of a horse's feet coming along the track through the scrub. In a few moments horse and rider appeared, and the girl slipped her weapon into the pocket of her short riding skirt.

"How do you do, Miss Fraser?" cried the newcomer as he jumped off his horse and hurried up to her with outstretched hand and an eager light in his eyes; "this is a pleasant surprise. I was on my way to see your father, and when riding along the beach below caught sight of your filly feeding on the bluff. I knew that it could be no one but you who would camp here, so instead of going on to Fraser's Gully, I turned off; and here I am."

"And I am very glad to see you, Mr Forde," said the girl, as she shook hands; "now, will you have something to eat? I have plenty of Fraser's Gully fare here—beef and damper—and I've tea and sugar in my saddle-bag."

"So have I. And now, whilst I light a fire, tell what brought you here to-day? To look at the sea—the 'ever treacherous sea'—I suppose, and 'wish you were a man,'" and the speaker smiled into the brown eyes.

"You are very rude, Mr Forde; the rudest clergyman I ever met. Certainly, I've only met three in my life, but then——" Here the brown eyes lit up laughingly. "They were different from you."

"I have no doubt about it," and the man laughed like a boy, as taking up some dead sticks he broke them across his knee. "But you haven't told me how it is I am so fortunate

as to find you here—fifteen miles off the track to Fraser's Gully."

"Oh! the old story. Some of our horses are missing, and I have been trying to pick up their tracks."

Forde, with an earnest look in his blue eyes, looked up from the fire he was kindling, and shook his head gravely. "You should not venture so far away, Miss Fraser. How can you tell but that whilst you are trying to pick up the horses' tracks that the blacks about Repulse Bay are not now engaged in picking up yours?"

"Oh, I am not afraid of any of the myalls¹ about Whitsunday Passage and Repulse Bay, Mr Forde. I really believe that if I rode into one of their camps they would not bolt. Poor wretches! I do feel sorry for them when I know how they are harried and shot down—so often without cause—by the Native Police. Oh, I hate the Native Police! How is it, Mr Forde, that the Government of this colony can employ these uniformed savages to murder—I call it murder—their own race? Every time I see a patrol pass, I shudder; their fierce, insolently-evil faces, and the horrid way they show the whites of their eyes when they ride by with their Snider carbines by their sides, looking at every tame black with such

¹ Wild blacks.

a savage, supercilious hatred! And their white officers—oh, how can any man who pretends to be a gentleman, and calls himself a Christian, descend to such an ignominious position as to lead a party of black troopers? If I were a man, and had to become a sub-inspector of Native Police, I would at least blacken my face so as to hide my shame when I rode out with my fellow-murderers and cut-throats.”

Her eyes, filled with tears as they were, flashed with scorn as she spoke. The clergyman looked admiringly at her as he put his hand on her arm.

“You must remember, Miss Fraser, that the wild blacks on this coast have committed some dreadful murders. How many settlers, miners, and swagmen have been ruthlessly slaughtered?”

“And how many hundreds of these unfortunate savages have been ruthlessly slaughtered, not only by the Black Police, but by squatters and stockmen, who deny the poor wretches the right to exist? We have taken away their hunting grounds! We shoot them down as vermin, because, impelled by the hunger that we have brought upon them, they occasionally spear a bullock or horse or two! Why cannot the Government do as my father suggests—reserve a long strip of country

for these poor savages, just a small piece of God's earth that shall be inviolate from the greedy squatter, the miner, the sugar planter? And let the wretched beings at least live and die a natural death."

The clergyman's face flushed as he listened to her passionate words. "It is, I believe, impossible to segregate the coastal tribes of the Australian mainland. The cost of such an attempt would, in the first place, be enormous; in the second, the people of the colony——"

"The *people*, Mr Forde! You mean the squatters, the sugar-planters, the land-devouring swarm of 'Christians,' who think that a bullock's hide, worth twenty shillings, is of more moment than the welfare of thousands of poor, naked savages, whose country we have taken, and yet of whom we make beasts of burden—hewers of wood and drawers of water. Oh, if I were only a man!"

"But you are, instead, a beautiful girl, Miss Fraser."

"Don't pay me any compliments, Mr Forde, or I shall begin to dislike you, and work you a pair of woollen slippers like English girls do in novels for the pale-faced, ascetic young curates, with their thin hands, and the dark, melancholy eyes."

Forde laughed heartily this time, and held

out his own hands jestingly for her inspection ; they were as brawny and sunburned as those of any stockman or working miner, and were in keeping with his costume, which was decidedly unclerical. For he only wore his clerical "rig" when visiting towns sufficiently populous for him to hold services therein. At the present time he was clad in the usual Crimean shirt, white moleskins, and brown leather leggings, and the grey slouched felt hat affected by most bushmen. His valise, however, contained all that was necessary—even to the wreck of a clerical hat—to turn himself into the orthodox travelling clergyman of the Australian bush.

"Ah! I was only joking, Mr Forde, as you know. *You* are not the usual kind of 'parson.' That is why father—and everyone else—likes you. Then, too, you can ride—I mean sit a horse as an Australian does ; and you smoke a pipe, and—oh, I wonder, Mr Forde, that you never married! Now I am sure that Mrs Tallis admires you. In fact she told me so, and Kaburie is a lovely station, and——"

The clergyman laughed again. "Thank you, Miss Fraser. I'm afraid I should not have courage enough to propose to a brand-new widow even if I was sure she would say 'yes.'" Then he added quietly, "There is only one woman in the world for me ; and I

have not even dared let her know I care for her. I want her to get to know me a little better. And then a bush parson is not a very eligible *parti*."

"Oh! I don't see why not, though I don't think *I* should like to marry a clergyman."

"Why?" He asked the question with such sudden earnestness that she looked up.

"Oh! one would have to visit such a lot of disagreeable women, and be at least civil to them. Take old Mrs Piper for instance. She gave fifty pounds towards the little church built at Boorala, and made your predecessor's life miserable for the two years he was in the district. She told him that she strongly disapproved of single clergymen 'under any circumstances,' and tried to make the unfortunate man propose to Miss Guggin, who is forty if she's a day, and poor Mr Simpson was only twenty-five."

"No wonder he fled the country."

"No wonder, indeed! Then there are the Treverton family at Boorala; very rich and highly respectable, though old Treverton was a notorious cattle duffer¹ in Victoria. Father says that Mr Treverton would have made the patriarch Jacob die with envy. He started from Gippsland with a team of working bullocks, six horses, and twenty-four cows and calves to

¹ Cattle stealer.

take up new country on the Campaspe River, and, in six months' journey overland, his herd of cattle had increased to a thousand head—most of them full-grown, and by some mysterious agency they were branded 'T' as well! And the six horses had multiplied to an astonishing extent; from six they had grown to fifty, all in six months! And now Joseph Treverton, Esq., J.P., and Member of the Legislative Assembly, is one of the richest squatters in the North, and the Misses Treverton speak of their 'papa' as 'one of the very earliest pioneers of the pastoral industry in North Queensland, you know.'"

The girl's frank sarcasm delighted Forde, the more so as he knew that what she had said was perfectly true.

"Well, it is a new country, you see, Miss Fraser, and——"

Just then the two horses raised their heads and neighed, and Forde, going to the edge of the bluff, saw a horseman coming along the beach in a direct line for where they were camped.

"We are to have company, Miss Fraser. There is some one riding direct for the bluff."

CHAPTER IX

IN less than half-an-hour the new-comer, who was walking his horse, slowly rode up to the bluff, and raised his hat to Miss Fraser and her companion.

"Good-morning!" he said, as he dismounted. "I saw you as I was coming along the beach and so turned off. Am I on the right track for Kaburie, and Fraser's Gully?"

"Yes," replied Forde, "this is the turn off here for both Kaburie and the Gully; the main track goes on to Boorala. Will you have some tea?"

"Thank you, I shall be very glad of a drink." Then again raising his hat to Kate, he said, "My name is Gerrard. Are you Miss Fraser?"

"Yes," replied Kate smiling, "and you are Mr Gerrard of Ocho Rios, I am sure, for I have seen your photograph. But how did you guess I was Kate Fraser?"

"I really could not tell you; but somehow I felt certain that you were the young lady whom Mr Lacey described so admiringly to me a day or two ago."

"Did he? The dear old man! How nice of him," and she laughed merrily. "Mr Gerrard, this is my friend, the Reverend Mr Forde, of Boorala—and hundreds of other towns as well."

The two men shook hands, and in a few minutes Gerrard was conversing with him and his fair companion as if he had known them for years, and both Forde and Kate were much interested in learning the object of his visit to Kaburie.

"I do hope you will buy Kaburie, Mr Gerrard," said Kate; "it is a really splendid station, and I am sure that you will like it better than your place away up on Yorke's Peninsula. Of course," she added, with her usual serene frankness, "I am very, very sorry that Mrs Tallis is not coming back, for we are great friends, and always exchanged visits once a week, and now I shall miss going there very much. And, oh, the garden of which she was so proud! I suppose now——" she stopped, and reddened slightly.

"Go on, please," said Gerrard with assumed gravity, though his eyes were smiling.

"I was about to be rude enough to say that most men don't care much for flowers."

"If I buy Kaburie, Miss Fraser, I will come to you, cap in hand, and humbly beg you to instruct me what to do; and furthermore, I

promise that when you say 'do this' it shall be done."

"You are undertaking a big contract, Mr Gerrard," said Forde with a laugh, as he rose to go to his horse; "you will have to send to Sydney for a Scotch gardener."

As soon as the clergyman was out of hearing Gerrard, who had remembered Lacey's remark about "a parson being in the running," said quietly.

"I certainly am a most forgetful man, Miss Fraser, and ask your forgiveness. Here is a letter for you, which my friend Aulain asked me to deliver to you."

The girl blushed deeply as she took the letter, for she instinctively divined that Gerrard had purposely deferred giving her the letter whilst Forde was with them. And from that moment she liked him.

"Thank you, Mr Gerrard," she said, as she placed the letter in the pocket of her skirt. "Is Mr Aulain any better?"

"Yes, but he won't be 'fit' for another six weeks or so. He has had a very bad attack of fever this time. Of course you know that he and I are old friends?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! He always writes and speaks of you as 'old Tom-and-Jerry.' And I am so really, really glad to meet you, Mr Gerrard. Randolph says that you are the

finest scrub rider in Australia, and he is next."

"Ah, no, he is the first, as I told Lacey a couple of days ago. His own troopers can hardly follow him when——"

"Don't, Mr Gerrard! I know what you were about to say," and she shuddered; "but please do not ever speak to me of Mr Aulain in connection with the Native Police. I loathe and detest them, and would rather he were a working miner or a stockman, than a leader of such fiends."

"Randolph Aulain is a different stamp of a man from the usual Inspector, Miss Fraser. No one has ever accused him of cruelty or unnecessary severity in discharging his duties."

"It is an ignominious duty, I think, to shoot and harass the blacks in the manner the police do," persisted Kate. "When the brig *Maria* was lost here on the coast some years ago, and some of the crew killed by the blacks, the Government acted most cruelly. The Native Police not only shot the actual murderers, but ruthlessly wiped out whole camps of tribes that were hundreds of miles away from where the vessel was lost."

Gerrard nodded. "So I heard. But I can assure you, Miss Fraser, that the Native Police under men like Aulain, can, and do, good service. The blacks in this part of the

colony are bad enough, but on Cape York Peninsula, they are worse—daring and ferocious cannibals. The instinct to slay all strangers is inborn with them. Some of the tribes on the Batavia River district I believe to be absolutely untamable.”

“Would *you* shoot a black-fellow, Mr Gerrard, for spearing a horse or bullock?”

“No, certainly not! But you see, Miss Fraser, we squatters would not mind them killing a beast or two for food occasionally, but they will spear perhaps thirty or forty, and so terrify a large mob of cattle that they will seek refuge in the ranges, and eventually become so wild as to be irrecoverable. I can put down my losses alone from this cause at over a thousand head. Then, again, two of my stockmen were killed and eaten three years ago; and this necessitated inflicting a very severe punishment.”

The girl sighed, but said no more on the subject.

“You will stay with us to-night, will you not, Mr Gerrard?” she said as Forde returned. “It will be so pleasant for father and me to have both Mr Forde and you with us for the night.”

“Thank you, I will, with pleasure. Perhaps your father—and you too—will come on to Kaburie with me in the morning, show me the

ropes, and tell me something about the country. And then you can see how the garden looks as well."

Kate's eyes brightened. "Indeed, we will! I love Kaburie. When we heard that it was to be sold, father tried to lease it from poor Mrs Tallis, but she wanted to sell outright, so father has to keep 'pegging away' at the claim, and our old rattle-trap of a crushing mill. But some day, perhaps, we shall 'strike it rich' as the miners say."

The horses were again saddled, and the party set out on their way, riding single file along the narrow bush track towards the ranges in which the little mining camp was situated. The sun was well towards the west when they came in sight of the rough, bark-roofed shed with uncovered sides, which contained the battery plant, and Fraser's equally unpretentious dwelling, which, with three or four miners' huts constituted the camp. A bright, brawling little mountain stream, with high banks lined with the graceful whispering she-oaks, gave a pleasant and refreshing appearance to the scene, and the clash and rattle of the heavy stampers as they crushed the golden quartz, echoed and re-echoed among the rugged tree clad range.

A big, broad-shouldered man of about sixty years of age, who was engaged in thrusting

a log of ironbark wood into the boiler furnace, turned as he heard Forde's loud *coo-e-e*! and came towards them. He was bareheaded, and clad in a coarse flannel singlet, and dirty mole-skin pants, with knee-boots; and his perspiring face was streaked with oil and grease from the engine. Taking a piece of cotton-waste from his belt, he wiped his hands leisurely as the three travellers dismounted.

"Father," said Kate, "I couldn't find the horses. But I 'found' Mr Forde, and this is Mr Gerrard, who is going to Kaburie, and who has promised to camp here to-night."

"Glad to see you," and the big man shook hands with Gerrard; "how are you, Forde? Get along up to the house, Kate, and I'll follow you soon. Give Forde and Mr Gerrard towels. I daresay they'll be glad of a bathe in the creek before supper. You know where the whisky is, parson. Help yourself and Mr Gerrard."

"How is she going, father?" asked Kate.

"Oh! just the same, about half an ounce or so."

("She", in miners' parlance, was the stone then being crushed—a crushing is always a "she." Sometimes "she" is a "bully-boy with a glass eye; going four ounces to the ton." Sometimes "she" is a "rank duffer." Sometimes "she" is "just paying and no more.")

Simple as was the girl's question, Gerrard

noted the grey shadow of disappointment in her dark eyes, as her father replied to it, and a quick sympathy for her sprung up in his heart. And to Fraser himself he had taken an instantaneous liking. Those big, light-grey Scotsman's eyes with their heavy brows of white overshadowing, and the rough, but genial voice reminded him of his brother-in-law Westonley.

"I'll give the old man a lift," he said to himself, as he walked beside Kate to the house.

"What are you thinking of, Mr Fraser?" asked Kate, "I really believe you are talking to yourself."

"Was I?" he laughed, "it is a habit of mine that has grown on me from being so much alone. What a splendid type of a man your father is, Miss Fraser."

The glance of delight which shone in her eyes made Tom Gerrard's heart quicken as it had never before to the voice of any woman.

CHAPTER X

DOUGLAS FRASER was a widower, his wife having died when Kate was only four years of age. She was now nineteen, and had been her father's constant companion and helpmate ever since the death of her mother. Fraser, who to all appearance was only the ordinary type of working miner common to all Australasian gold-fields, was in reality a highly-educated man, who had been not only a successful barrister, but a judge of the District Court of New South Wales. The death of his wife, however, to whom he was passionately devoted, changed the whole course of his existence. Resigning his appointment, he withdrew himself absolutely from all society, sold his house and such other property as he possessed, and then, to the astonishment of his many warm friends, disappeared with his little daughter from Sydney altogether. A year or so later one of these friends came across him riding down the main street of the mining township of Gympie (on the Mary River in Queensland). He was in the ordinary diggers' costume, and the once clean-shaved, legal face was now covered with a rough, strong beard.

"How are you, Favenc?" said his ex-Honour the Judge, quietly, as he pulled up his horse, and dismounted; "have you too, caught the gold-field fever, that I see you in Gympie?"

"No! I'm here on circuit with Judge Blakeney—Crown-Prosecuting. And how are you, Fraser?"

"Oh, very well! I've gone in for mining; always had a hankering that way. So far I have had no brilliant success, but hope to get on to something good in the course of time."

For some years after this he wandered from one gold-field to another, always getting further northward, and always accompanied by his child, to whom he was able to give a good education, though not in a style that would have met with the approbation of the principal of a ladies' school. He had finally settled at Fraser's Gully, where he had discovered a large, but not rich reef, and for the past five years he and some half a dozen miners had worked it, sometimes doing very well, at others their labour yielding them a poor return. On the whole, however, he was making money, and the life suited him. Very often he would urge Kate to go to Sydney for a year or two, and see something of the world, under the care of her mother's people, but she steadfastly refused to leave him.

"It would be simply horrible for me, father.

I could not stand it for even a month. I am very, very happy here with you, and only wish I had more to do."

"You have quite enough I think, little woman—keeping house for me, milking and dairy work, and making bread for seven hungry men."

"I like it. And then I am the only woman about here now that Mrs Tallis has gone, and I feel more important than ever. But I *do* wish I were a man, and could help you more than I do."

Between father and daughter there had ever been the greatest love and confidence, and their existence, though often monotonous, was a happy one. To her father's miners, "Miss Kate" was a fairy goddess, and consternation reigned among them when one day a passing Jewish hawker told them that it was rumoured that Parson Forde was "a stickin' up ter Miss Fraser, and the match was as good as made."

The men had bought a couple of bottles of whisky from the hawker when this portentous announcement was made, and little "Cockney Smith" the youngest man of the party, who was just about to drink off the first grog he had tasted since his semi-annual spree at Boorala, set it down untouched.

"I thought the bloomin' Holy Joe was a comin' 'ere pretty frequent," he said, "but

didn't think he was after Miss Kate. Well, all I can say is,"—he raised his glass—"that suthin'll 'appin to 'im. I 'ope 'e may be bloomin' well drowneded when 'e's crossin' a creek."

"Shut up, Cockney," growled Sam Young, an old grey-haired miner, "it's only a Boorala yarn, and Boorala is as full of liars as the bottomless pit is full of wood and coal merchants. And it doesn't become you to call the parson a Holy Joe. Maybe you've forgottten that when you busted your last cheque at Hooley's pub in Boorala, and had the dilly trimmings, that it was the parson who brought you back here, you boozy little swine. Didn't he, boys?"

"You bet he did," was the unanimous response.

"And come here and give you four good nips a day outer his own flask until you was rid of the green dogs with red eyes, and flamin' fiery tails that you was screechin' about," went on Sam, relentlessly. "If she's going to hitch up with the parson it can't be helped. Anyways he's the right sort of a sky pilot; a white man all over, and can shoe a horse, and do a bit of bullocking¹ as well as he can preach."

"Wasn't there some talk about her and the Black Police officer being engaged?" said the

¹ Hard manual labour.

hawker, who was a great retailer of bush gossip.

"Wasn't there some talk of you havin' done time for trying to do the fire insurance people?" angrily retorted Young, who was wroth at the hawker's familiar way of speaking of the goddess of Fraser's Gully.

"It vasn't me at all," protested the hawker.

"It vas another Isaac Benjamin altogether."

"What did he do?" asked Cockney Smith.

"He had a store in Brisbane," said Young, "and insured the stock for about two thousand quid,¹ and made an awful fuss about his being so careful of fire. He bought about fifty of them round glass bottles full of a sort of stuff called fire exstinker—bottles that you can hang up on a nail with a bit of string, or put on shelves, or anywhere, and if a place catches on fire, they burst, and the exstinker liquid sends out a sort of gas which puts out a fire in no time. One'll do the trick.

"Well, this chap—of course it isn't your fault, Ikey, that your name is the same as his—was dead set on getting that two thousand quid for his stock, which was only worth about five hundred. But he was such a downy cove—did you ever come acrost him, Ikey?"

"No, never," emphatically replied the hawker. "and he vasn't no relation of mine either."

¹ "Quid" £1.

"Well, as I was saying, he was always making a fearful fuss about a fire, and as he was a member of the Fire Brigade Board, he was always bringing forward ressyolutions at the Committee meetings for a better water supply, and all that sort of thing, and he gave a five pound note to the driver of the fire engine because he was a temperance man of fifteen years' standing, and set a noble example to the Brigade. Did you hear about that, Ikey?"

"No, I didn't," answered the hawker uneasily.

"Well, he did. He hated liquor in any shape or form, he said, and wouldn't sell any in his store on no account whatever, and wanted all the Fire Brigade men and other public servants to take the pledge. And the noosepapers said he was a great-hearted phillyanthropist.

"He had two boys in the store to help him—was it two, Ikey?"

"I don't remember, Mr Young. I vas never much interested in reading about rogueries of any kind."

"Just so! Well, one Sunday night one of the boys came back to the store for suthin' or other, and he sees you—I mean the feller as has the same name—emptying out the fire liquid in the exstinkers, and fillin' 'em up with

kerosene. So, being a cute young nipper, he slips away to the Fire Brigade station and says to the Superintendent, 'Give me ten bob an' I'll tell you a secret about Ikey Benjamin and his fire exstinkers.' The Super gave him the money, and the boy tells the yarn, and about two o'clock in the morning the fire bells starts ringin', and Ikey was aroused from a dead sleep with the noos that his store was alight in seventeen places, but that the firemen was puttin' it out vigorously. How many years did you—I mean the other cove—get, Ikey?"

"I don't know," replied the hawker, "but I do know that I must be getting along to Boorala," and hurriedly gathering together his effects, he departed in a bad temper.

Young gave his mates a solemn wink, and then laughed.

"He's the chap, boys; and if he hadn't started gassin' about Miss Kate, I wouldn't have started on him. As for what he said about her and Mr Aulain, there's some truth in it. The Inspector is dead sweet on her, I know, but whether she cares for him is another matter. Anyway she hasn't seen him for nigh on two years, so I think it must be off. And you all know what she thinks of the Nigger Police, don't you?"

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The arrival of the Goddess of the Gully with her two companions created quite a little stir at the camp. As soon as Forde and Gerrard had finished their refreshing bathe in the crystal waters of the creek, and returned to the house, they found Kate had supper ready. She had changed her riding dress for a white skirt and blouse, and looked as Forde said, "divinely cool and refreshing."

"Father will be here in a few minutes," she said, as going to a small overmantel she deftly re-coiled her hair, which had a way of becoming loose. "What a nuisance is a woman's hair, isn't it, Mr Gerrard? Now, Mr Forde, *why* don't you say it is her glory? Don't be shocked at me, Mr Gerrard, but the fact is I am short of hair-pins, and this morning when the filly began bucking, I lost nearly all I had. I think I shall do my hair *à la Suisse*."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said her father, who just then entered after a hasty "wash down" in a tub placed at the back of the house, "there are a lot of native dogs about, and you might lose it."

Both Forde and Gerrard, and Kate as well, laughed loudly, for they all knew that in the winter time, when the dingoes¹ were hungry they would often bite off the tails of calves not old enough to kick off their assailants.

¹ The Australian wild dog.

Kate clenched her little sunbrowned hand, and punched her father on his mighty chest. "You rude man! You don't deserve any supper."

Late in the evening, as Forde and his host were walking to and fro outside the house, and Kate was reading Aulain's letter in her room, Gerrard was stretched out upon his bed, smoking his pipe, and talking to himself.

"I wish I had never seen you, Miss Kate Fraser. And I wish Aulain, my boy, that you were safely married to her. And I wish that there were two more like you, Miss Kate—one for me, and one for the parson. And I wish I was not such an idiot as to wish anything at all."

CHAPTER XI

JUST as dawn broke, the deep note of a bell-bird awakened Kate from a somewhat restless and troubled slumber; but quickly dressing, she took up a bucket and set off to the milking-yard.

The ground and the branches of the trees above were heavily laden with the night-dew, and in a few minutes her feet were wet through, and then, ere she had walked half the distance to the yard, several long-legged, gaunt kangaroo dogs, who were watching for their mistress, made a silent and sudden rush to welcome her, leaping up and muddying her shoulders with their wet paws, and making determined efforts to lick her hair and face.

Presently a loud whistle sounded from somewhere near, and "Cockney Smith" appeared driving before him two cows, and in an instant the dogs darted off to him, and let the girl enter the yard in peace.

"Why, Miss Kate, them 'ere dorgs will bite the 'ed off'n you if you don't use a whip on 'em when they get prancin' around like that," and he lashed out at them with the whip he carried.

Kate laughed. "Poor doggies! they badly want a day's kangarooing, so I must not mind their roughness. I think, Smith, if we can only find the missing horses this week we'll have at least half-a-day's run with the dogs on Sunday. To-day I am going with my father to Kaburie."

"Right you are, Miss!" said the young miner, who, like his mates, revelled in a kangaroo hunt. "On'y yesterday near the claim, I seed an old man kangaroo as big as a house, but er course, bekos I was on foot, and hadn't got no dorgs with me, 'e took no more notice of me than if I was a bloomin' howl. 'E just stood up on 'is 'ind legs, and looked at me for about five minutes with a whisp o' grass hangin' outer 'is mouth; then 'e goes on feedin' has if 'e didn't mind dorgs or 'orses, or men, and hadn't never heerd o' kangaroo-tail soup in 'is life."

"Perhaps we may get him next Sunday, Smith. Now, bail up, Maggie, and if you try to kick over the bucket you'll feel sorry, I can assure you," and she smacked a jet black little cow on the ribs with her strong, shapely brown hand. The beast put her head through the bail; "Cockney" quickly pinned her in, then secured her "kicking" leg with a green hide leg-rope, and the Goddess of the Gully began to milk. "Cockney" stood

by watching, pipe in mouth, and waiting till Kate was ready for the second cow to be put in the bail.

"Here's Jackey and 'is missus, as usual, Miss Kate," he said, pointing to the slip rails of the milking yard, on which a large "laughing jackass," and his mate had perched, and were regarding Kate with solemn attention.

"Oh, the poor things! I forgot their bread this morning. I was thinking about something else."

Don't you worry about 'em, Miss," said Smith, with a grin, "they can take care 'o themselves, Miss Kate."

"Yes, Smith."

"I went to look at that 'ere guinea hen what was sittin' on eleven eggs under that sort o' cotton bush in the 'orse paddock."

"Did you? The chicks will be out in three or four days."

"They are out already, Miss; them two laughin' jackasses 'as heaten up every blessed egg, and on'y the shells is lef'. I thought I saw 'em flying about the nest, and went to see."

"Oh, the wretches!" cried Kate in dismay.

"Next ter halligaters, laughin' jackasses his the mischievioustest, and cunnin'est things hin creation," observed Mr Smith; "hif I 'ad my gun 'ere now I could take 'em both hin

a line. Look at 'em setting there like two bloomin' cheerybims, who 'adn't never seen a hegg o' any kind but their own."

"Oh, no, don't shoot them, Smith. I feel very mad with them, but wouldn't hurt them for the world. They kill and eat such a lot of snakes — bad snakes, 'bandy-bandies' and 'black necks.'"

"So I believe, Miss. And perhaps that is wot fills 'em with such willianly; they himbibes the snakes' cunning after they 'as digested 'em. I onct heerd a naturalist cove as was getting birds on the Diamantina River say that he was dead certain there wasn't no laughin' jackasses in the Garden o' Eding, which was a smokin' great pity."

"Why?" asked Kate, as she rose, put the milk bucket aside, and let Smith bail up the second cow.

"Oh, he says, says he, as he was skinnin' a jackass which had a two foot whip snake inside him, 'if one o' you fellers 'ad a been in Eding, poor Heve wouldn't 'ave got hinter no trouble, hand we 'uman bein's 'ud go on livin' for hever like Muthusalum. The old serpent,' says he, 'wouldn't a 'ad the ghost of a show hif han Australlyian laughin' jackass 'ad copped him talkin' to Heve, and tellin' 'er it was orlright, and to go ahead an' heat as much as her stomach would accomydate.'"

"Oh, I see!" said Kate gravely, "I must tell that to Mr Forde."

"'E won't mind—'e'll on'y larf," said Mr Smith, who was a talkative young man for an Australian bushman, native to the soil. (The nickname of "Cockney" had been bestowed upon him on account of his father being a Londoner, who, like a true patriot, had left his country for his country's good.) He was a good-natured, hard-working man like the rest of the hands at the camp, but was the "bad boy" of the community as far as liquor was concerned. Every three months, when Fraser "squared up" with his miners, and handed them their share of the proceeds from the gold obtained, he gave them all a week's leave to spend in Boorala, or any other township in the district. Not more than two or three would elect to go, but of these Cockney Smith was always one. On such occasions Kate would stand at her father's door on the look-out—to see that Mr Smith did not ride off without being interviewed.

"How much have you this time, Smith?" she would ask.

"Forty-five quid, Miss."

"I'll take ten."

"Thirty-five pound don't go far in Boorala, Miss," he would plead, uneasily.

"It will go far enough for you to see the

Police Magistrate, and be fined five pounds, or take fourteen days for disorderly conduct, and also enable you to pay that wicked wretch of a Hooley for the poisonous stuff he gives you to drink, and keep him from taking your horse and saddle. In fact I think you might go with thirty pounds this time."

"Oh, 'Eavens, Miss!" and Cockney's features would display horrified astonishment as he hurriedly handed her ten one-pound notes. "Why it's the winter meetin' of the Boorala Jockey Club, and I'll want an extra ten quid to put on a couple o' 'orses; one is a bay colt that won——"

"That will do, Smith. You are a bad lot. You tell me horrible stories. Instead of going sober to the race-course, you go drunk, and are robbed, or lose your money, or fight the police, and——"

"Didn't I pull it orf, larst Christmas, Miss, with Banjo in the 'urdle race? Didn't I collar a hundred and five quid from that Melbourne bookie?"

"Yes. And what became of it? How much of it did you bring back? Just thirty shillings! And you couldn't do any work for nearly two weeks; and you had *delirium tremens*. Now, go away, and if you come back as you did last time father won't have any more to do with you—and neither will I."

Smith would ride off with his companions. "She made me ante up ten quid this time," he would observe—expecting sympathy.

"Well, it's ten pound to the good for you, you boozing little owl," would be the reply. For all the men at the camp knew that during two years Kate had placed various sums to the credit of Smith at the Boorala bank, and had extorted a solemn promise from him not to attempt to write a cheque for even one pound without her consent. But, as she felt she could not trust Cockney, she had also taken the bank manager into her confidence, and asked him to refuse to honour any cheque drawn by "the bad lot" unless it had her endorsement.

The bank manager, who was another of Kate's adorers, promised to observe her wishes. "It's not banking etiquette, Miss Fraser, but that doesn't matter in North Queensland. We do many things that we ought not to do, and if Smith draws a cheque you may be sure that I will refuse to pay it as 'signature illegible'—as it is sure to be. But I'll lend him a few pounds if he breaks out again, and is laid up in this abode of sin, so that he may get home again to your protecting care."

The milking was finished, and Smith, taking up the heavy bucket of milk, was just about to carry it to the house, when he set it down again.

"My word, Miss," he said admiringly, "look there ; there's that Mr Gerrard a-gallopin' 'is 'orse down to the creek for a swim bareback. My oath, 'e can ride."

Kate turned just in time, and saw Gerrard, who was in his pyjamas with a towel over his shoulders, disappearing over the ridge at a full gallop. She did not know that he had risen long before she had, walked in the grey dawn to the horse paddock through the dew-soaked grass, caught his horse, and had been an interested spectator of her dairy work.

"Yes, Smith, he *can* ride, as you say. And his horse wanted a swim after such a hot ride from Port Denison."

As they walked back to the house, Kate saw her father coming towards them, and let Smith go on.

"Father," she said, "I am glad to see you before breakfast as I shall not perhaps have a chance to speak to you if we are going to Kaburie to-day with Mr Gerrard."

"What is it?"

"Mr Aulain has written to me. He wants me to marry him."

"So does Forde, who asked me for you last night."

Kate laughed.

"We'll talk about it by and by, my girl," said Fraser gravely, as he stroked her head.

“There will not be much to talk about, father,” was the decisive answer. “I am never, never going to leave you for any man—no matter who he is.”

CHAPTER XII

FRASER, his daughter and their two guests were on the road to Kaburie, and within a few miles of the turn-off to Boorala. Kate and the clergymen were together, her father and Gerrard some hundreds of yards in advance, and all were walking their horses slowly, for the sun was beating fiercely down upon them through the scantily-foliaged gum trees, and Kaburie was yet twenty miles away. The girl sat in her saddle with bent head, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

"I am very, very sorry, Mr Forde, for I *do* like you very, very much—more than any other man in the world except my father. You have always been so kind to him and to me; but I never thought that you would ask me to be your wife. And it hurts me to——"

Forde placed his hand on hers. "Never mind, Kate. It was a foolish dream of mine, that is all. But you were always the one woman in the world to me ever since I first met you two years ago. And it grieves me that I should have made you shed one single tear."

His calm, steady voice, and the firm

pressure of his hand reassured her. Her father had said to her a few hours before that Forde would take her refusal "like a man," and she had replied that she knew it.

She raised her face to his as he bent towards her, and, on the impulse of a moment, born of her sincere liking for the man, kissed him. His bronzed features flushed deeply, and his whole frame thrilled as their lips met; and then he exercised a mighty restraint upon himself.

"Good-bye, little woman, and God bless you," he said softly, as he bent over her.

"But why are you going away, Mr Forde? Father will be so distressed, and so indeed will be everybody — for hundreds of miles about."

Forde had drawn himself together again, and swinging his right foot out of the stirrup sat "side-saddle" and lit his pipe.

"Well, you see, Kate, my mother has left me two thousand pounds or so. It was that that gave me pluck enough to speak to your father last night. I thought I would go to him first. Perhaps I made a mistake?"

"No, indeed! He told me all that you said to him, and—oh! Mr Forde, we shall all miss you so much," and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears again. He looked at the gum tree branches overhead, and went on meditatively,

apparently not taking heed of her emotion, though his heart was filled with love for the girl, who with bent head, rode by his side.

"And I shall miss much—much out of my life when I leave this part of the colony, Kate. But I was never intended to be a clergyman. I was driven into the Church by my mother—good, pious soul—who, because my father was in the Church, condemned me to it, instead of letting me follow my own bent—which was either the Army or Navy or Commerce."

"But you made a good clergyman," said the girl artlessly.

He shook his head. "Well, the fact is, Kate, that I was always pretty sick of it, although I must say that I like the free open life of the bush, and the people; especially the working men, diggers, and stockmen. And their frank hospitality and rough good nature I can never forget."

"Where do you think of going?"

"To Sydney first. Then I'll decide what to do. I am very much inclined to follow your father's example and go in for mining; either that or cattle-breeding. But, of course, I shall write and let you know."

"Do!" she said, earnestly, and then they quickened their horses' pace, as they saw that Fraser and Gerrard had pulled up at

the turn-off to Boorala, and were awaiting them.

"Well, Forde, old man," said the mine-owner, as he bade the clergyman good-bye, "you will leave a big hole in the hearts of the people about here. Kate and I especially will miss you. And I do hope that we shall meet again."

"Nothing is more likely. I like Queensland too much to leave it altogether," and then with another warm grasp of the hand, he said good-bye to them all, and turned along the Boorala track.

"One of the whitest men that ever put foot in stirrup," said Fraser a few minutes later to Gerrard.

"I'm sure of it!" assented Gerrard. And then they began to speak of Kaburie, Fraser giving his visitor every possible information about the country and its cattle-carrying capabilities. It was, he said, one of the best-watered runs in the north, and a drought had never been known.

"See!" he said, pointing to a sandal-wood scrub, "that is one of the mustering camps on the Kaburie boundary, and there are some of Mrs Tallis's cattle down there in the creek. Crack your whip, Kate."

Uncoiling the long stock-whip, the girl cracked it once only, but loudly, and in a few seconds hundreds of cattle appeared from

the creek, and through the fringe of she-oaks that lined its banks; they clambered up the steep side and stared at the disturbers, and then at a second loud crack of the whip, trotted off quietly to the camp — bullocks, steers, cows and calves, the latter performing the usual calf antics, curving their bodies, hoisting their tails, and kicking their heels in the air. Once under the cool, grateful shade of the dark green foliage of the sandalwoods, they quietly awaited to be inspected, and Fraser and Gerrard slowly walked their horses about among them.

"What do you think of them?" asked the mine-owner, who was himself a good judge of cattle.

"Very fair lot indeed, and all as fat as pigs," replied the squatter, scanning them closely. "Now then, Bully boy, what are you staring at?" he said to a sturdy twelve months' old bull calf, who had advanced to him. "Ah! you want to be branded, do you? Quite so! Well, I think it very likely you soon will be."

"There has been no branding at Kaburie for six months, Mr Gerrard," said Kate, who added that there were now only Mrs Tallis's overseer, and one black boy stockman on the station, who did nothing more than muster the cattle occasionally on the various camps.

Gerrard nodded. "Ladies are bad business people as a rule. There will be a terrible amount of branding to be done now."

Kate, unaware of the twinkle in Gerrard's eyes, was indignant. "Indeed, Mrs Tallis was considered a very good business woman, and knew how to manage things as well as Mr Tallis. What are you laughing at, Mr Gerrard?"

"At Mrs Tallis's smartness. She has saved herself some hundreds of pounds by dismissing her stockmen, and leaving the calves unbranded. All the work and expense will fall on whoever buys the station."

"Oh, I see!" and Kate smiled. "But, after all, I suppose——"

"That all is fair in love and war. And buying a cattle or sheep station is war in a sense between seller and buyer. I should have done the same thing myself, I suppose."

"I don't believe you would," said the girl frankly. "Mr Aulain told father and me that you were very Quixotic."

"Aulain doesn't know what a hard nail I am in money matters sometimes, Miss Fraser. I'm a perfect Shylock, and will have my pound o' flesh—especially bullock flesh."

"I know better, and so do you, father, don't you," and her eyes smiled into Gerrard's. "Mr Aulain told us all about your selling a hundred

bullocks to the French authorities at New Caledonia, and then, because half of them died on the stormy voyage to Noumea, you returned half the money. Was it your fault that the steamer was nearly wrecked, and the cattle died?"

"Aulain did not think that it might have only been a matter of my setting a sprat to catch a mackerel. You see I was anxious to establish a big cattle trade with the French people."

Kate shook her head decisively, but there was an expressive look in her eyes that gave Gerrard great content.

Towards the afternoon the travellers saw a horseman coming towards them, and Kate recognised him as Tom Knowles, the overseer of Kaburie, for whom Gerrard had a letter from Mrs Tallis. He was a lithe, wiry little man of fifty, and Kate and her father exchanged smiles as, when he drew near, they saw that he was arrayed in his best riding "togs," was riding his best horse, and that his long grey moustache was carefully waxed. He had long been one of Kate's most ardent admirers, and had a strong belief that he was "well placed in the running with Aulain and the parson" for the young lady's affections—and hand.

"Well, this is a pleasure," he cried, as he

rode up and shook hands with Fraser and his daughter; "I was coming over to Gully to spend an hour or two with you, Fraser, but, of course, you are coming to me?"

"Yes!" said the mineowner. "This is Mr Gerrard, Knowles. He has come to see you on business, and we came with him."

The overseer, who had at first looked at Gerrard's handsome face with some disapproval, at once became at ease, and in a few minutes, after Gerrard had explained the object of his visit, the party put their horses into a smart canter, and half-an-hour later came to a wide, sandy-bottomed creek, fringed with huge ti-trees. On one of these, which was on the margin of the crossing, was nailed a large black painted board with an ominous inscription in white.

"LOOK OUT FOR ALLIGATORS."

"Mr Tallis had it put up," explained the overseer to Gerrard; "as two men were collared by 'gaters here. But when the water is clear, and the creek low, as it is now, there is no danger. It is when the creek is high after rain, and the water muddy, that the crossing is risky. I suppose you have any amount of the brutes up your way?"

"Thousands! The rivers, creeks, and swamps are full of them, and I have lost

a lot of cattle and horses at Ocho Rios by them."

An hour later they arrived at Kaburie, and Kate was, at the request of the admiring Knowles, acting as hostess and preparing supper.

CHAPTER XIII

Two days had passed, and Gerrard was still at Kaburie, though Kate and her father had left the previous day; they were, however, to return, bringing with them three or four stockmen to assist Knowles and Gerrard to muster the cattle, for he had decided to buy the station and leave Knowles there as his manager. Although there were but four thousand head of cattle on the run, they were widely separated in small mobs of a few hundreds each—some high up in the ranges, and some haunting the low-lying littoral, and frequenting the flat marshy land about the mouths of the numerous creeks debouching into the sea, where they eagerly ate the lush, saline grasses and creepers that lined the coast above high-water mark—and to “round up” all these scattered mobs on their various camps, and count every beast, meant very hard work. Then too, Gerrard intended to have a general branding at the same time, and he felt a thrill of pleasure in his veins, when Kate had said to her father :

“Father, why cannot we help, too? You can safely leave the battery and claim to Sam

Young for a few days. And as you and I know the country so well, I am sure we should be of some use to Mr Gerrard."

Douglas Fraser had never said "No" in his life to any request of Kate's since she was fifteen, and he smiled assent. And then in addition to that he had taken such a strong liking to Gerrard that it gave him pleasure to afford him all the assistance in his power.

"All right, Gerrard!" (men in the Australian bush do not "Mister" each other after a few hour's acquaintance) "we shall be here. And I'll send over to Boorala for three or four good men to help in the mustering."

So Kate and her father had ridden away and left Gerrard and Knowles to themselves for a few days; and Gerrard and the dapper little overseer planned all sorts of improvements that were to be effected in the way of making Kaburie a crack breeding station.

As father and daughter rode side by side along the track back to their home, through the darkening shadows of the coming night, they talked about Forde and Aulain, Fraser resting his big brown hand on her knee, and looking wistfully into her face.

"And you see, my child, that I well know that there will come a time when you and I must part. Some man——"

"Never, father, never! I liked Mr Forde

very much, but not well enough to marry him, and part from you. And I kissed him, dad, when we said good-bye. Do you mind much? I couldn't help it. I felt that I *must* kiss him." (Then tears.) "I thought I had better tell you, for I feel so horribly ashamed of myself."

"There is nothing for you to be ashamed of, child," said her father tenderly; "Forde is a *man*, and, as I told you, he would take your refusal like a white man and a gentleman."

"He did. And I could not help crying over it."

For some minutes they rode on in silence, then Fraser said:

"When is Aulain coming?"

"As soon as he is able to sit a horse, he said," and then her face flushed. "I wish he would not come, father, and yet I do not like the idea of writing to him and telling him so—especially when he is ill."

Fraser nodded. "I understand. Still I think it would be the better course to take. I had imagined, however, Kate, that you thought more of Aulain than you cared to admit, even to me."

"So I did; and so I do now, but I would never marry him, father, no matter how much I cared for him."

Her father looked at her inquiringly.

"I think I am afraid of him, dad, sometimes.

He is so dreadfully jealous, and he has no right whatever to be jealous of me, for we were never engaged. And then there is another thing that is an absolute bar to my marrying him, though I fear I am too much of a coward to tell him so; he is a Roman Catholic. And whenever I think of that I remember the awful tragedy of the Wallington family."

"I think you are quite right, Kate," said the mine-owner gravely. "Frankly, whilst I think Aulain is a fine fellow, and would make you a good husband, I must confess that the thought of your marrying a Roman Catholic has often filled me with uneasiness."

"Don't be afraid, dad," she said decisively. "In the first place, I am not going to marry anyone, and shall grow into a pretty old maid; in the second, if I was dying of love, nothing in the world would induce me to marry a Roman Catholic. Whenever I think of poor Mr Wallington as we saw him lying on the grass with the bullet hole through his forehead, I shudder. I loathe the very name of Mrs Wallington, and consider her and Father Corregio the actual murderers of that good old man."

She spoke of an incident that had occurred when she was sixteen. Wallington, a wealthy Brisbane solicitor, had gone to England on a six months' visit. When he returned, he found

that his wife and only daughter, a girl of five and twenty, had fallen under the influence of a Father Corregio, and had entered the Roman Catholic Church, and his long and happy married life was at an end. A week later he shot himself in his garden.

"I am afraid that poor Aulain will cut up pretty roughly over this, Kate," said her father presently.

"I can't help it, father. And I think, after all, I had better write to him to-morrow. I really do not want him to come to the Gully."

And she did write, and Aulain's face was not pleasant to see as he read her letter.

"By ——! if it is the parson fellow, I'll shoot him like a rat," he said, and then he cursed the fever that kept him away from Kate.

He went over to the *Clarion* office and saw Lacey, who was quick to perceive that something had occurred to upset the dark-faced sub-Inspector.

"How are you, Aulain? Any 'shakes' to-day?" he asked, referring to the recurring attacks of ague from which Aulain suffered.

"Oh! just the usual thing," replied his visitor irritably, as he sat down on a cane lounge, and viciously tugged at his moustache. "I thought I would come over and worry you with my company for a while, and get you

to come across to the Queen's and share a bottle of fizz with me. They have some ice there I hear—came up by the Sydney steamer last night."

Lacey's eyes twinkled, "I'm with you, my boy. I've just finished writing a particularly venomous leader upon mine adversary the *Planters' Friend*, and a nice cool drink, such as you suggest, on a roasting day like this, will tend to assuage the journalistic rage against my vile and hated contemporary."

Arriving at the Queen's Hotel the two men went upstairs and sat down on comfortable cane lounges on the verandah, and in a few minutes the smiling Milly appeared with a large bottle of champagne, and a big lump of the treasured ice, carefully wrapped up in a piece of blanketing. As Lacey attended to the ice, Aulain began to cut the cork string.

"Oh! by the way, Lacey," he said carelessly, "I saw in the *Clarion* yesterday that Forde, the sky pilot, is leaving the Church. Are you ready with the glasses."

"I am. Faith, doesn't it look lovely. Steady, me boy, these long sleever glasses hold a pint. Here's long life to ye, Aulain. Heavens! but it is good," and he sighed contentedly as he set down his glass again.

"Ye were asking about Forde?" he said

as he wiped his red, perspiring face. "Yes, he is giving up parsonifying. I had a letter from him by the mailman yesterday from Fraser's Gully. He was staying there for the night with our friend Gerrard."

Aulain's black brows knit, and his hand clenched under the table, as Lacey went on.

"His mother has died, and left him some money. And very glad it is I am to hear it, for a finer man I don't know."

"Much?"

"He didn't say; but I know that his mother was pretty well off. He merely wrote me asking me to mention in the *Clarion* that he was leaving the Church, and was going South. Ye see, he has a power of friends all over the country, and he just asked me to write a bit of a paragraph saying he was going away, and regretted that he could not come to Port Denison to preach next Sunday fortnight."

Aulain re-filled Lacey's and his own glass, "Lucky fellow! When is he leaving Fraser's place?"

"He was leaving that morning for Boorala, and Fraser and his daughter and Gerrard were going with him as far as the turn-off. By a bit of good-luck, Gerrard—who also sent me a few lines—met Forde and Miss Fraser on his way to the Gully. Here is his note,"

and he took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Aulain, who read:

“FRASER’S GULLY.

“DEAR LACEY,—As the Boorala mailman is calling here this morning, I send you a line. I had the good fortune to come across Miss Fraser and Mr Forde at Cape Conway, and we all came on to her father’s place together. I like Fraser. He’s a fine old cock. The parson, too, is a good sort. As for Miss Kate Fraser, she is a modernised Hotspur’s Kate—a delightfully frank and charming girl. I envy the lucky man who wins her. I hope the boy has not got into any mischief, and is giving you no trouble. Give Aulain my regards, and tell him I delivered his letter sooner than I anticipated. I leave for Kaburie this morning, and am to have the pleasure of being accompanied by Fraser and his daughter. Tell Jim that if he gets into any mischief whilst I am away, I’ll make it hot for him.—Sincerely yours,

TOM GERRARD.”

Aulain handed the letter back to Lacey. He was outwardly calm, but his heart was surging with passion. What business had that d——d parson fellow and Kate to be together at Cape Conway, fifteen miles away from her home? And then his receptive brain conjured up the blackest suspicions. Forde had come into money, and Kate had written to him saying that she could not marry him, “because she would never marry and leave her father.” He set his teeth.

"I think we could do another bottle, Aulain," said Lacey presently.

"Right, old man!" replied the sub-Inspector mechanically, and then Lacey noticed that his bronzed face had become pallid.

"'Shakes' coming on?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Just a bit; but the fizz is doing me good."

CHAPTER XIV

MUSTERING on Kaburie was almost over, much to the satisfaction of every one taking part in it, for the weather had been unpleasantly hot even for North Queensland, and heavy tropical thunderstorms had added to the difficulty of the work by the creeks coming down in flood. All the cattle running in the mountain gullies and on the spurs, had been brought in, the calves and "clean-skins" branded, and now there remained only those which roamed about the coast lands.

Early one morning Gerrard, Fraser, and Kate, with three stockmen, were camped near the mouth of a wide, but shallow creek, whose yellow, muddied waters were rushing swiftly to the sea. The party had arrived there the previous evening, and now, breakfast over, were ready to start to muster the cattle in the vicinity. Heavy rain had fallen during the night, but Kate's little tent, with its covering fly had kept her dry, and the rest of the party had slept under a rough, but efficient shelter of broad strips of ti-tree bark spread

upon a quickly - extemporised frame of thin saplings.

Just as they started the sky cleared and the blue dome above was unflecked by a single cloud as they rode in single file along a cattle track leading to the beach, which they reached in half an hour.

"What a glorious sight!" said Gerrard, as he drew rein and pointed to the blue Pacific, shimmering and sparkling under the rays of the morning sun. "Look, there is a brig-rigged steamer quite close in—evidently she must be calling in at Port Denison, or would not be so near the land."

"Yes," said Kate, "that is one of the new China mail boats, the *Ching-tu*. How beautiful she is—for a steamer, with those sloping masts, with the yards across, and the curved shapely bow like a sailing ship. Oh! I do so wish I were on board. I love ships and the sea. If I were a man I should be a sailor."

"Would you?" said Gerrard, as he looked at the animated, beautiful face. "I, too, am fond of the sea, though it robbed me of father, mother, and a brother-in-law, my twin sister's husband. She died of a broken heart soon after."

Kate's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, how dreadful!" and then as they rode on Gerrard told her the story of the *Cassowary*.

"What a sweet child your little niece Mary must be," she said, when he had finished, "and I am sure, too, that your *protégé*, Jim Coll, must be a perfect little man. I wish I could see him."

"I can safely promise you that, now that I have bought Kaburie, and I feel pretty sure that you will gain his affections very quickly; especially if you will let him ride that bucking filly. I daresay that I shall be back here within twelve months, and bring Master Jim with me."

"This is where we separate, boss," said a stockman named Trouton, "if you, Mr and Miss Fraser and me take the right bank of this creek, my two mates will work down on the other bank, and we'll get the cattle on both sides at the same time, and drive 'em all on to Wattle Camp, which is between this creek and the next to the south of us." Then turning to the other stockmen, he warned them to be careful of alligators.

"You chaps must keep your eyes skinned if you have to swim any bits of backwater, now the creeks are up. Don't cross anywheres unless you have some cattle to send in fust, and keep clost up to their tails if yous can't get in among 'em. 'Gaters like man and horse meat next best to calf."

The two men nodded, and riding down the

bank, crossed the creek and quickly disappeared in the scrub on the other side; then Gerrard's party turned towards the coast, Trouton leading the way with the packhorses along a well-defined cattle-track. A quarter of an hour later they came across a small mob of cows and calves, which as the stockwhips cracked, trotted off in front, to be joined by several more, and in a short time the mob had increased to five hundred head, and Trouton and Gerrard decided to drive them across the creek to join those which were being rounded up by the two stockmen on the left hand bank. In reply to a question by Gerrard, Trouton said that the crossing was a good one even when the creek was as high as it was then, on account of its width—about two hundred yards from bank to bank.

"It is a hard, sandy bottom, boss, and we shall only have about forty yards of swimming to do. If we rush 'em they'll get over in no time."

"Very well. But we will cut out all the cows with calves too young to swim."

This did not take long, and some thirty or forty cows with calves were separated from the mob, and driven some distance back into the scrub by Fraser. Then with the usual yelling and cracking of whips the main mob was rushed down the bank into the water, a wide-horned,

stately bullock, plunging into the yellow stream, and taking the lead. Close behind the cattle followed the three men and Kate, the latter and Gerrard keeping on the "lee" side of the mob so as to prevent them spreading out and getting too far down-stream, where there was danger from a number of snags of ti-trees, which showed above water in the middle of the creek. The cattle, however, kept well together, and when the deep part was reached, swam safely across, despite the rather strong current.

"They went over splendidly, didn't they?" cried Fraser to Gerrard, as he gave his horse a loose rein and leant forward to let the animal swim easily. "We are lucky to get them over so easily, and——"

His words were interrupted by a cry of terror from Kate, as the colt she was riding gave an agonised snort of terror, and began pawing the water with its fore-feet.

"Help me, father! Mr Gerrard! Oh, it is an alligator!" and as she spoke she was nearly unseated. "It has Cato by the off hind leg."

Gerrard, only ten yards away from her, turned his horse's head, and shouted to her to throw herself off, and then, with a deadly terror in his heart, saw her shaken off; and disappear in the surging stream, but in a few seconds she rose to the surface, panting and choking, but

swimming bravely, though she was unable to see. Gerrard, now beside her, leant over, placed his left arm round her waist, and held her tight.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "I have you safe ; take a good grip of my horse's mane and hold on ; he will take you across in a few minutes," and as the girl obeyed, he slipped out of the saddle, so as to swim beside her. Then his bronzed face went white with horror as the black snout of an alligator thrust itself out of the water between the girl and himself, and the saurian tried to seize her by the shoulder. In an instant Gerrard had clutched the reptile by the throat with his right hand.

"Go on, go on ; for God's sake, do not mind me!" he cried to Kate ; "I have the brute by its throat," and then, as he and the hideous creature were struggling fiercely, Fraser came to his assistance, and emptied the five chambers of his heavy Colt's pistol into its body, and Gerrard, whose face was cut open by a stroke of one of the reptile's fore-paws, remembered nothing more till he found himself lying upon the bank with Fraser and the stockmen attending to him.

"Is Miss Fraser safe?" was his first question.

"Yes, thanks to God and to your bravery," answered Fraser with deep emotion ; "but don't

speak any more just now, there's a good fellow. The brute has ripped the left side of your face open from the top of your head to the chin, and we are trying to put in some stitches."

"All right," was the cheerful, but faint response; "but tell me—is my eye gone?"

"No, boss," said Trouton quickly, "your eye is all right, but the eyebrow is mauled pretty badly, and was hanging over it, but we've got it back again now, and tied it up in place. Here, boss, take a sup o' this," and he placed a brandy flask to Gerrard's lips. The liquor stung his lacerated lips like fire, but it revived him.

"Where is Miss Fraser?" he then asked.

"Here, beside you, dear Mr Gerrard," said the girl brokenly, as she pressed his hand, and turned her face away in blinding tears.

"Narrow squeak for both of us, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but please do not try to talk, dear Mr Gerrard."

"Oh, I'm all right, and must gabble a bit, now I know that I haven't lost an eye. You see, Fraser, the beast, although he was only a little fellow——"

"Eight feet he were, boss," interrupted Trouton, "but a young 'un, as you say."

"Well, just after I collared him, he swung his head about and hit me such a tremendous

smack on the side of my brain-box that it stunned me. But I didn't let go, did I?"

"No," replied Fraser, "you held on like grim death. I settled the brute by putting five bullets into it."

"There was two 'o 'em, boss," said Trouton, "the one as collared Miss Kate's horse, and the one as you tackled."

"Did Cato get away?" Gerrard asked quickly.

"Yes, yes, he got away," said Kate hurriedly, trying to speak calmly, though the poor colt, which had managed to struggle to the bank with a lacerated and broken leg, was then lying dead with a bullet through its head. Trouton had put it out of its misery.

There was no more mustering that day, for Gerrard's condition was so serious, though he tried to make light of it, that Fraser, leaving the cattle to the care of the two stockmen, first sent off Trouton to Boorala for a doctor, and then he, taking one of the pack-horses, made Gerrard mount his own,

"We'll be at Kaburie as soon as the little German doctor is there," he said, as he, Gerrard, and Kate started.

And when they reached Kaburie they found Doctor Krause, a quiet, spectacled little man, awaiting them with Knowles the overseer.

"Will he lose his eye, Krause?" asked

Fraser, after the doctor had attended to Gerrard, and he with Kate met him in the dining-room.

"No, but his face is very much cut about, and the poor fellow may be disfigured for life."

Kate turned away with a bursting heart, and went to her room.

CHAPTER XV

"POOR, dear, old Tommy boy!" said Westonley to his wife, as they sat at their breakfast table some weeks after the mishap to Gerrard. The mail had just arrived at Marumbah, and brought a letter from his brother-in-law, and one from Fraser. His eyes glistened as he laid them down upon the table, and looked at his wife, who, he could see, was also visibly affected, whilst little Mary sobbed unrestrainedly.

"I wish this Mr Fraser had telegraphed to us, Edward. I would have left Marumbah the same day, and gone to poor Tom to nurse him."

"Would you, old girl?" and the big man rose from his seat and kissed her, his thick, heavy beard spreading out over her shoulders.

"Indeed, I would. And now it is no use my going, is it?"

"Not a bit, Lizzie. You hear what Fraser says—'He is getting on splendidly, and the left eye is saved.' Let me read it all over again; shall I?"

"Do," and her pale, clear-cut features flushed; "it makes me feel as if I were there and saw

the whole dreadful sight. Don't cry any more, Mary dear. Uncle Tom is getting better."

"If Jim had been with him, it wouldn't have happened," said the child, suppressing her sobs, and wiping her streaming eyes; "Jim would have been sure to have seen the alligator coming before any one else, and done something. I am quite sure that even if he met a bunyip he would not be afraid; but would fight it."

"I'm dead certain of it, Mary," said Westonley, as he put his big hand upon the child's head, and then taking up Fraser's letter, he again read it aloud. It described in simple language Gerrard's desperate struggle with the alligator, then went on about his courage and fortitude under agonising pain, for the wounds caused by alligators' claws invariably set up an intense and poisonous inflammation, and take a long time to heal, and concluded by saying, "as long as life lasts, I shall never forget that only for his heroic conduct I should now be a childless man, and my daughter have died a death too fearful to contemplate."

Gerrard's letter was in his usual laconic style.

"DEAR TED,—I have bought a little station here called Kaburie—good cattle country with about 2500 head on it. In getting a mob across a creek I was mauled by an alligator' and if it had not been for

my friend Fraser—in whose house I am now staying for a week or so—shooting the beast, it would have had me. It is nothing serious, so don't worry over me—some deep cuts on my face, that is all, and Mr Fraser and his daughter (a charming girl) are coddling me up. Jim is with me. I left him with your old friend Lacey at Port Denison, but the young beggar wouldn't stay when he heard that I had had an accident. He is making great running with pretty Miss Fraser. Give my love to Lizzie and Mary, and tell the latter that I trust her bear is now thoroughly convalescent. Jim will write to Mary by next mail. He went out early this morning fishing with Miss F——, and did not know that the mailman was calling to-day.—Yours ever, TOM.”

Mary's face brightened at the prospect of a letter from her dearly-beloved Jim, and Mrs Westonley smiled. Ever since Gerrard's visit to Marumbah Downs, her once icy and austere manner to the child had, bit by bit, relaxed, until at last she had thawed altogether, and had been amply repaid by such a warm response of affection that she now made a companion of the little one, and found herself a much happier woman now that the sweet sunlight of childish love had penetrated and melted her former frigid reserve. Westonley had noted the change with unalloyed delight, but, like a wise man, had pretended not to notice; but one day, soon after Gerrard's letter had arrived, he could not suppress him-

self. He had been away on a business visit to his squatter neighbour Brooke, to whom he had sold his cattle station in Central Queensland at a very satisfactory figure, and as he rode up to the slip-rails of the home-paddock, he saw the one time "incubus" coming flying towards him, her sun-tanned face wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, Uncle Ted, Uncle Ted!" she panted, as she took down the slip-rails, and let Westonley pass through, "just fancy, Uncle Ted!"—and as she spoke, she lifted the slip-rails in place again and turned to him with a beaming face, out of breath, and so wildly excited that she could scarcely speak.

"What is the matter, young 'un?" and the big man bent down and swooped her up into the saddle in front of him.

"Oh, Uncle Ted, this is the very, very first time in my life that I was glad you were away!"

"How's that?"

"AUNT LIZZIE LET ME SLEEP WITH HER LAST NIGHT."

A great joy came into Westonley's heart. "Did she? Really and truly?"

"Really and truly! And oh, Uncle Ted, it was lovely! We talked and talked and talked for such a long time, and she told me such a lot of things about the school she was

at in England, and about the girls there—some were very nice, but there were some horrid ones. Oh, she told me heaps of things. It was lovely, and we had Bunny in the room, too”—here she paused to catch her breath—“he tried to get in through the mosquito curtains, and got all tangled up, and tore a most enormous hole in them, and Aunt Lizzie only laughed, and said it didn’t matter!”

“You *must* have had a bully time.”

“Splendid! And Aunt Lizzie and I are going to the beach together one day next week to get pippies, and she says she won’t mind if she gets sopping wet right up to her face.”

When they reached the house they found Mrs Westonley awaiting them on the verandah, and when her husband put his arms around her and kissed her repeatedly, she blushed like a young girl. And as the days went on he saw with delight that she had at last taken the child to her heart.

Breakfast was over, and Westonley in his study was talking to his head stockman when he saw Brooke riding up.

“Lizzie,” he called to his wife, “here is Brooke. I expect he will have some breakfast, so tell Mrs Patton.”

Brooke, a tall, powerfully-built man, and usually as boisterous as a school-boy in his

manner, seemed very quiet as he dismounted, shook hands with Westonley and his wife, and patted Mary's head.

"Just in time for breakfast, Mr Brooke."

"No, thank you, Mrs Westonley. I had mine at five o'clock—I made an early start, as I wanted to get here as soon as possible, thinking that very likely Westonley might be going out on the run somewhere, and that I might miss him. I want to have a talk with you, old man."

Mrs Westonley and Mary at once left the room, both wondering what was the matter with Brooke—he looked so worried and depressed.

"Westonley, old fellow," he said, as he sat down, "give me a big brandy and soda. I've ridden hard all the way from my place." Then he looked at the letters and newspapers still lying upon the breakfast table. The latter, he saw, were unopened. Drinking off the brandy and soda, he said:

"You haven't opened your *Argus* yet, I see?"

"No, we had some bad news about Tom Gerrard—he's been mauled by an alligator, and we haven't bothered about newspapers this morning."

"Not seriously hurt, I trust?" anxiously asked the squatter, who had a sincere regard for Gerrard.

"No, I am glad to say. I'll show you his letter presently. But what is the matter, Brooke? You look worried."

"I am—most infernally worried. Tell me, old man, what did you do with that cheque of mine for eight thousand?" (The cheque to which he alluded was the price of the station in Central Queensland which he had bought from Westonley a few weeks previously.)

"Paid it into my bank," replied Westonley, instantly surmising that Brooke's financial affairs had gone wrong.

"Dacre's?"

"Yes."

"Westonley, old chap, I have bad news for you. I got a telegram from Melbourne last night—Dacre's Bank has smashed, and smashed badly—hopelessly, in fact."

Westonley's florid face paled.

"Smashed!"

"Utterly smashed. Will it hit you hard?"

"Break me! I had thirty thousand pounds on fixed deposit, a current account of about fifteen thousand—including the eight thousand you paid me, and every penny of my wife's money, little Mary's, and Jim's were in Dacre's," and, man as he was, his voice trembled.

"It won't break you—by heavens, it shall *not* break you, Westonley! I bought Comet Vale from you for my boys, but I'll give it

back to you for three—for five—years to help you to pull up."

"Thanks, Brooke," and the big man grasped his friend's hand mechanically. "This has dazed me a bit. Come outside, and we'll talk it over."

He rose unsteadily, placing his hand on the edge of the table, and then fell forward upon his face, and lay still—his big, generous heart had ceased to beat.

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When Brooke rode away late that night on his way home thinking of his dead friend, he reproached himself for so often having spoken of Elizabeth Westonley as "a pretty automaton, with as much heart in her as a doll." For her silent grief had showed him that she had loved her husband.
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CHAPTER XVI

THE news of Westonley's sudden death was a great shock to Gerrard. The brief telegram from his half-sister had been forwarded to Port Denison, and Lacey had sent it on to him at Fraser's Gully, by the mailman, together with a copy of the *Clarion*, containing the telegraphed account of the Dacre's bank failure. Had Gerrard looked at the newspaper, he might perhaps have connected Westonley's sudden end with the financial disaster, which had brought ruin to so many thousands of Australian homes, for he knew that his brother-in-law banked at Dacre's. But Mrs Westonley had said nothing of the cause of her husband's death—"Edward died suddenly yesterday. Am writing you fully to-night to Port Denison" was all that she had said.

"Dear old Ted!" he said as his eyes filled, and he saw before him the great, bearded face with the kindly, mirthful eyes, and heard the deep, gruff voice. "How can I tell Jim—the boy will be heartbroken."

And Jim's grief almost unmanned "Uncle

Tom," as the boy now called him. Putting the telegram in his pocket, he went down to the battery, where his *protégé* was being inducted into the mysteries of amalgamation by Fraser.

"Jim," he said quietly, "come along the creek with me for a bit of a stroll."

"Is your face paining you much this morning, Uncle Tom?" said the boy, as they left the battery, and walked towards the creek, "you look quite white."

"No, sonny," and he placed his hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder, "my face isn't paining me, but I have a thundering big pain in my heart, Jim—a pain which you must share with me. I have just had a telegram 'from Marumbah—with very, very sad news."

"Is it about Mary?" and the boy's lips quivered; "is she sick, Uncle?" and then, with a gasp—"is she dead?"

"No, sonny, Mary is all right, but Mr Westonley is dead," and then he told him all that he could tell.

An hour later, when they returned to the house, and Kate Fraser wondered why they looked so quiet and depressed, Gerrard told her of the news he had received.

"Poor Jim!" she said, as she put her arms round the boy, who was trying hard not to again break down.

Then Gerrard went on to say that he would now have to change his plans somewhat.

"I must get back to Port Denison tomorrow, Miss Fraser. I want to send some telegrams as well as letters. But as it will take my sister's letter quite a fortnight to come from Marumbah, I shall put in most of the time at Kaburie, and, if I may, also inflict myself upon your father and yourself occasionally."

"Do. We shall be so glad."

Two days later he and Jim were back in Port Denison, and lunching with Lacey at the Queen's Hotel. Then for the first time Gerrard heard of the Dacre bank failure.

"It must have been a fearful shock to poor Ted," he said to Lacey; "and perhaps it was that that killed him, for, as you say, the bank suspended on Saturday, and he died early on the Monday following. I fear he must have been hit very badly by the smash, for he not only had a lot of money in it, but was a big shareholder in the concern as well."

"That's unfortunate, for yesterday's news gives further revelations of the smash, which is the very worst that has occurred in the Colonies. Every one thought that Dacre's bank was as solid as the rock of Gibraltar."

This intelligence disturbed Gerrard greatly—so much so that after lunch he sent a telegram to Westonley's Melbourne agents—who were

also his own—and asked them if they could tell him how his sister would be affected by the collapse of Dacre's. In a few hours he received an answer—"Deeply regret to say everything will be swept away."

"Poor Lizzie!" he said to Lacey after dinner, as they sat on the verandah, smoking; "this will be terrible news for her—if she does not already know of it. Thank God, I can help her to some extent," and he meant to "help" her by giving her Kaburie, for which he had only a few days previously sent Mrs Tallis a draft upon his bankers for six thousand pounds

"You were lucky not to have had anything in Dacre's."

"Very, for Westonley was always cracking it up to me. He urged me strongly only six months ago to buy a hundred shares—a pretty hole I should be in now if I had taken the poor fellow's advice."

"Yes, indeed. But no one ever dreamt of Dacre's being anything but one of the soundest banks in the world. It is a blackguardly affair—a cruel, shameless fraud—and I hope that the men who are responsible for it will each get seven years' hard labour."

"They deserve it. I suppose that Westonley, with Marumbah Downs, and Comet Vale, and the funds he had in Dacre's was worth a hundred thousand at least; and now my poor sister and

little Mary Rayner will be absolutely penniless. Thank heaven, I did not take his advice, but stuck to the Capricornian Pastoralists' Bank."

The editor of the *Clarion* gasped and dropped his cigar. But he quickly recovered himself, and turning his face away from Gerrard, puffed out volumes of smoke most energetically, considering what he should do. He soon decided. "Better tell him the grim truth at once," he thought.

"Gerrard!"

The change in his voice struck his companion—it was low, grave, and sympathetic.

"What is it, Lacey? Now, out with it. You have something unpleasant to tell me, and don't like doing it. I'll bet you drinks that I can guess what it is. I saw you start when I mentioned the Capricornian Pastoralists' Bank. Has that 'busted' too?"

"Yes. It smashed yesterday as a result of the Dacre collapse. The news was in my rag this morning."

"Was it? I didn't look at the *Clarion* to-day. Is it a bad case?"

"Very bad; about a shilling in the pound is all that will come out of the wreck. Will you be hard hit?"

"Rather! Curls me up like a corkscrew. To pay Mrs Tallis her six thousand pounds I gave a mortgage on Ocho Rios for five thousand

pounds as I only had about three or four thousand pounds in the Capricornian. I'm deuced lucky that it wasn't more."

He rose from his seat and paced angrily to and fro on the verandah for a moment or two, then he stopped suddenly, and a smile lit up his scarred face.

"What an ass I am, Lacey! The thing can't be helped, but only a little while ago I had made up my mind to give Kaburie to my sister; and now I can't pay for Kaburie, for my draft for six thousand pounds is worthless to Mrs Tallis, and all the labouring of mustering and branding has gone for nothing. Poor little woman! I am sorry for her! Isn't it a beastly mess?"

"You think too much of others, Gerrard, and too little of yourself."

"I don't! I'm very fond of being good to myself, I can assure you. But a smack in the face like this is enough to make a saint swear like an Australian Member of Parliament. Now, I bought Kaburie with the idea of making it a breeding station—prize cattle and all that sort of thing—for Ocho Rios. Then when I received this telegram from my agents in Melbourne telling me that my sister would be left penniless, I made up my mind to write to her by the next mail south, and tell her that Kaburie was for her and my niece Mary. And another thing I

wanted to do was to give a man I know a good lift." (He meant Fraser.) "And now I'll be as good as stony-broke for the next two years."

"I wish I could help you," began Lacey, earnestly.

"Thanks, old man. It is awfully good of you, but I shall pull through all right in the end, and with a good season or two should easily lift the mortgage on Ocho Rios. All I am scared of now is a drought, but if a drought does come, I can't stop it, and therefore, it is no use my worrying about it." He hoisted his feet upon the table, and touched the bell for the waitress. "Well, thank heavens, Lacey, I still have a thirst, and an iced brandy and soda is very soothing to the nerves. Milly, bring the ice again please, and if you see the boy tell him to come here."

Jim soon appeared, still looking subdued and depressed.

"Sit down here, old son, and have a long drink of ginger ale with a lump of ice in it," and he put his hand on the boy's arm, and made him sit down between himself and Lacey. "Jim, my son, I've just had some beastly bad news. I've lost a lot of money, and you and I will have to work like niggers when we get to Ocho Rios. Savvy?"

"Yes, Uncle Tom. I will work very, very hard for you."

"For us both, Jim, and for Mary and Aunt Lizzie; for we are all in the same boat. I'll tell you the whole yarn by and by; but for the present we'll talk about something else for a change."

Lacey looked at him in silent admiration and wonder. "Nothing can disturb the equanimity of such a serene mind," he thought, "and I like him for taking the youngster into his confidence like that."

"I wonder what made Aulain leave so suddenly," said Gerrard, as Milly appeared with the ice, and the ginger ale for Jim. "It was strange of him not to even leave a note for me."

"Oh! when a man has fever he does very queer things. All he told me was that he was off to Brisbane to tender his resignation in person, and as that is against the regulations he hoped to be dismissed. He has been very strange lately. I think that matters have gone wrong in a certain quarter."

Gerrard nodded. "I know. Well, I'm sorry if it is the case. She is a bonny little lady."

Milly again appeared. "If you please, Mr Gerrard, Sergeant Macpherson would like to see you for a few minutes on important business."

"All right, Milly! Ask him to come up. Jim, I hope you haven't been up to any games while I was away."

The local Sergeant of Police was shown up.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "I have just had a wire from Cardwell from Inspector Sheridan, saying that news had come through by the mail boat from Somerset, that there has been a very bad bush fire up your way, and Ocho Rios station is destroyed."

"Any lives lost?"

"No, sir, but the fire spread all over the run for fifty miles about, and your stockman thinks that there are hardly two hundred head of cattle left. I am sorry to bring you such bad news, sir."

"Oh! don't apologise, Sergeant," was the quiet reply, "I'm getting used to bad news. Milly, bring a chair for Mr Macpherson, and another big glass, and some more ice. Now sit down, Sergeant, and tell me all about it. Jim, get off that railing, or you'll fall off into the street, and break your leg. My luck is dead against me. Light your pipe, Sergeant, and make yourself comfy."

CHAPTER XVII

"THE saying that misfortunes never come singly seems to be verified in your case, Mr Gerrard," said Kate Fraser, as, a fortnight after he had received the news of Westonley's death, he was relating his disastrous experiences to her and her father.

"Looks like it, doesn't it? But there are lots of fellows who have had worse luck than me, and so I shouldn't 'make a song' over mine. Now, do you know the story of Knowles's life?"

"No, he has never told us."

"Well, he told it to me yesterday" (Gerrard had been to Kaburie to tell the dapper little overseer that he could not pay for the station, and that he, Knowles, must re-take possession as manager for Mrs Tallis), "and I think the poor little chap only related it out of pure sympathy for me when I explained to him how I was fixed, and how sorry I was for him—as well as for myself—for I had doubled the salary he was receiving from Mrs Tallis."

"He told *me* that," said Kate, and her eyes sparkled with fun.

"Naturally, he would tell *you*," and Gerrard, with a faint quiver of one eyelid, gave Douglas Fraser a sly glance. "I am sure you must be the recipient of the confidences of all the country side, and would never 'give any one away,' as vulgar persons like myself would say; so please don't 'give me away' to Knowles." Then his voice changed. "Miss Fraser, that little man is both a hero and a martyr. He was in the Naval Brigade at Sebastopol, and was recommended for the V.C. for distinguished bravery in one of the futile attacks on the Redan. Did you know that?"

"No! He only told us that he was with Peel's Naval Brigade and had seen most of the fighting, was severely wounded, and that after he came home he left the Navy through ill-health, and came to Australia."

"Well, he didn't get the Cross after all; that was his first bit of bad luck. Then his father, who was always looked upon as a very wealthy man, went smash for a huge amount, which ruined hundreds of people, and then shot himself; so poor Knowles left the Navy and took a billet as house-master at a boys' college. Six months after, his uncle, Lord Accrington, died, and left Knowles twenty thousand pounds. Of that twenty thousand pounds he kept only five hundred pounds; every penny of the rest he gave to his dead father's creditors."

"How noble of him," said Kate.

"It was indeed, 'but you see,' he said to me, 'I didn't want the money. My mother had died years before, and I have no brothers or sisters, and it would have been a disgraceful thing for me to have kept the money after what had occurred. Lord Accrington was my mother's brother, and I was always a favourite of his (he did not like my father, and had not spoken to him for years). I never expected he would leave me a cent, and so it was no sacrifice on my part.' And then he said that ten years ago he had saved enough money to buy a small sheep station in the Riverina District, and then came the drought of '72 which broke him."

"Poor fellow!" said Kate, "I shall like him now more than ever."

Gerrard nodded. "One doesn't often come across such men. And, as I was saying, I have no reason to make a song over my affairs when so many other fellows have had worse luck than me."

Douglas Fraser, who for the past few days had been depressed in spirits, said, as he rose from his seat:

"True, Gerrard. It is of no use any one girding at his misfortunes, if they are not caused by himself. Sometimes a man thinks in mining parlance that he has 'struck it rich,'

and straightway begins building his Chateaux en Espagne. Then he finds he has bottomed on a rank duffer, and wants to swear, as I do now." He smiled and spread out his chest, "Kate, I'm going up to the claim to see Sam Young."

"And Mr Gerrard and I are going to the creek to catch some fish for supper."

"Very well! I shall come back that way and join you," and the big man strode off to the claim—half a mile away.

"Your father is not in his usual spirits, I think, Miss Fraser," said Gerrard, as he and Kate walked down to the fishing pool through the ever-sighing she-oaks which lined the banks of the creek.

"He is not; the reef has been gradually thinning out, and Sam Young told him yesterday that he is afraid it will pinch out altogether. Last Saturday's cleaning up at the battery only yielded ten ounces of melted gold—worth about forty pounds—and the week's expenses came to one hundred and forty pounds. I am afraid, Mr Gerrard, that father and I and all the men will have to leave Fraser's Gully, and set our faces to the North, and leave the old battery behind us to the native bears and opossums and iguanas and snakes," and her voice faltered, for she dearly loved the place where she had spent so many happy years.

"I am sorry," said Gerrard, musingly. "I suppose your father—if he does leave here—from what he said to me is thinking of going to the newly-opened gold fields on the Gilbert River?"

"Yes, in that direction at any rate, prospecting as we travel. That is the one thing that consoles me; I love the idea of seeing new country."

Gerrard made no answer for some minutes. He was thinking of a certain place on a creek, running into the Batavia River—the place "with a hunking big boulder standing up in the middle of a deep pool," of which he had spoken to Aulain, and he now half-regretted his promise to him to "keep it dark" for six months.

"Of what are you thinking, Mr Gerrard?"

"I was wondering if your father would care to make a prospecting trip up my way instead of going to the Gilbert rush. When I left Ocho Rios there were several prospecting parties on Cape York Peninsula—some of them doing very well—and I myself got seven ounces of gold in a few hours from a creek about sixty miles from my station. Unfortunately, however, another man as well as myself knows of this place, and he asked me not to say anything about it for six months. He means to go there with a prospecting party."

"You mean Mr Aulain," and Kate turned her frank eyes to his.

"How did you know?"

She flushed. "You remember the letter you brought me from him. In that letter he told me that he was leaving the Native Police, and intended going in for mining, as he knew of some very rich auriferous country near your station, and that you, who also knew of it, had promised him to keep it secret from any other prospecting party."

"Yes, I did. I should like to see Aulain 'strike it rich' as your father says, Miss Fraser," and then he smiled. "If only for the sake of my kind, patient nurse of last month."

Again Kate's face flushed. "I know what you mean, Mr Gerrard, but——" she bent her head, and began to tie on a fishhook to the line she was carrying. "But you are mistaken. I like Mr Aulain very, very much, but I do not like any one enough to—to—oh, dear! I've broken the snooding."

"Never mind, I'll fix it for you," and as his hand touched her's, a new hope came into his life. He knew what she meant him to understand—that she was not going to marry Aulain—and then he went on quickly.

"I gabble like an old woman, do I not, Miss Fraser? Oh, this is what I was about to say, I believe that the Batavia River district is

full of rich reefs and alluvial gold as well, and from what I hear from Lacey, I don't think the Gilbert will prove a permanent gold-field. Now, I will try to persuade your father to come to my part of the country instead of the Gilbert, which, by the time he reaches it, will probably be played out altogether, and abandoned."

"Ah! do persuade him, Mr Gerrard; I liked the thought of our going to the Gilbert, but I like better—oh, ever so much better—your suggestion of the Batavia River, for there we should be near the sea; and I love the sea and the beaches. I am horribly selfish, I am afraid."

Gerrard stroked his beard meditatively. "Yes, you'll be near the sea, Miss Fraser. But it is an awful country for a lady to live in; the fever is very bad there, and the blacks are a continual source of danger and trouble."

"Anything that my father can go through I can face too," she said proudly; "and besides that I have had fever, am not afraid of blacks or anything—except alligators," and she shuddered, as she smiled.

"Then you will be in a continual state of fear. All the rivers on the Peninsula are alive with them, and I have lost hundreds of cattle by the brutes." Then he laughed. "But they won't get many this year."

"How bravely he takes his misfortunes," she

thought. Then she said, "Well, I shall take good care of myself, and not cross any creeks if the water is not clear. Now here we are at the pool. Isn't it lovely and quiet? I do hope we shall have caught enough fish by the time father comes."

Gerrard, as he filled his pipe, watched her smooth, slender brown hands baiting the hook of her line with a small grasshopper, and noted the beautiful contour of her features, and the intent expression in her long-lashed eyes as she surveyed it. She looked up.

"Now, Mr Gerrard what *are* you doing? Don't be so lazy. I'll have at least three fish before you have your line ready. Oh, I do wish I were a man!"

"Why?"

"Because then I could smoke a pipe when I am fishing. It must be delightful! When father and Sam Young and Cockney Smith come here with me to fish, and I see them all looking so placidly content with their pipes in their mouths, I feel as if I was missing something. Now, watch!"

She made a cast with her light rod of bamboo, and almost at the same moment that the impaled grasshopper fell upon the glassy surface of the pool it was seized by a fish of the grayling species; known to Queenslanders as "speckled trout."

"There you are!" she cried triumphantly, as she swung the silvery-scaled beauty out of the water, and deftly grasped it with her left hand. "First to me."

The music of her laugh, and her bright, animated features, filled Gerrard with delight as he watched her make a second cast. Then he too set to work, and, for the next quarter of an hour, they vied to make the greatest catch. Gerrard was a long way behind, when Douglas Fraser appeared. He was saying over and over again to himself: "There is nothing between her and Aulian! there is nothing between them!" Then, as he put his hand to his scarred face, the wild elation in his heart died away.

"Well, young people, what luck?" said the burly mine-owner, as with his hands on his hips, he leant against a she-oak.

"Splendid, father! thirty-five. How is the reef going?"

"Pinched out all together, chick. We can hang the battery up now."

Kate laid down her rod, and covered her face with her hands, and Gerrard saw the tears trickling through her fingers. For she loved the Gully, as she had loved no other place before.

Fraser stepped over to her, and placed his hand on her bent head.

"Never mind, little girl! We'll strike it rich some day."

"Yes, father!" she whispered, as she smiled through her tears, "we *shall* strike a patch some day."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON their way home, Gerrard and Fraser discussed the position, and Kate's heart beat quicker when her father said, "I think you are right, Gerrard. I'll give up the idea of the Gilbert, and shall try my luck on the Batavia."

"Very well, it is settled. We can leave by the next steamer for Somerset."

"I meant to overland it."

"Don't think of it. It is over a thousand miles, and you would have to pass through some fearful country, full of poison bush, and would perhaps lose all your horses. Then, too, the blacks are bad, very bad."

"Some of my men will be sure to come with me; especially Young and Smith."

"Don't think of overlanding it," persisted Gerrard. "It would take you, even with the best of luck, two months to get to the Batavia. Come with me to Somerset. I think we can get all the horses we want there, and then we can go across country—only one hundred and fifty miles—to the Gulf side; if not, I'll hire one of the pearling luggers to take us round by Cape York."

So Douglas Fraser yielded, and when they reached the house, he sent word to the claim and battery for all the men to come to him.

"Boys," he said, as the toil-stained, rough miners filed into the sitting-room, "we'll have to clear out of the Gully now that the reef has pinched out. Now, Mr Gerrard tells me that there is both good reefing and alluvial country up about the Batavia River; all the creeks carry gold; so I am going there with him. Will any of you come in with me?"

Every one of them gave a ready assent.

"Why, boss," said Sam Young, "we coves ain't agoin' to leave you an' Miss Kate as long as we can make tucker and wages—or half wages, as fur as that goes. What say, lads?"

"Of course you can't leave us," said Kate with a laugh; "you all know what it is to have a woman cook."

"An' a lady doctor for them as have jim-jams," said one of them, looking at Cockney Smith, who shuffled his feet, and stared at something he pretended to see outside.

The matter was soon concluded, and the few following days were spent in crushing the last of the stone from the claim, and having a final clean-up of the battery. And Douglas Fraser could not help a heavy sigh escaping him, as he looked at the now silent machinery,

and the cold, fireless boiler, to be in a few years hidden from view by the ever-encroaching forest of brigalow and gum trees.

Knowles, when he heard they were going, came to say good-bye. He looked so dejected that Kate felt a real pity for him; especially now that she knew the story of his life.

"I'll be as lonely as a bandicoot after you go," he said frankly, as he twisted his carefully-waxed moustache; "and, by Jove, if I were not bound to stay at Kaburie for Mrs Tallis, I would ask your father to let me make one of his party. I don't know anything about mining, but I could make myself useful with the horses—sort of a cow-boy, you know."

"I really do wish you could come with us, Mr Knowles. We shall miss you very much. Father, when he looked at his chess-board yesterday, heaved such a tremendous sigh, and I knew that he was thinking of you, and wondering if he will ever find any such another player."

"Ah! I shall miss my chess, too. Still, one never knows what may happen, and it is possible that some day you may see me up on the Batavia, looking for a billet on some cattle station. I would go now if I could. But I must stick to Mrs Tallis, at least until she gets another manager."

"She won't let you leave Kaburie, Mr

Knowles. She likes you too much ; she told me so."

The little man's face suffused with pleasure. "It was very good of her. But I should like her ever so much more if she would give me a better salary."

"Ask her—she won't refuse you."

"Ah! I wouldn't have the courage ; a lady, you see, is different from a man."

"Write—that is easy enough. Now, promise me. And I can positively assure you that she will only be too glad." She put her hand on his. "Do promise me."

"I can refuse you nothing. But I need not write, for I think it very likely that now the sale of Kaburie is 'off' with Mr Gerrard, she will come back there to live. I had a telegram from her yesterday, in which she said that she might come back next month."

"Then, Mr Knowles, you will have to propose to her—that will be ever so much better than asking her for a bigger salary," and Kate laughed.

The ex-sailor blushed like a girl, then he tugged furiously at his moustache. "By Jove, Miss Fraser, I—I—you don't know—I—if I were not so old, and not so beastly poor—I was going to ask *you* to marry me. There, it's out now, and you'll think me an ass."

Kate's manner changed. What she had

feared he would one day say, he had now said, and she felt sorry for him.

"I think that you are such a man that any woman should be proud to hear what you have said to me, Mr Knowles," she said softly. "I know more about you than you think I do. But I shall never marry. I am going to stick to my father, and grow up into a nice old maid with fluffy white hair."

"You are not offended with me?"

"Offended! No, indeed. I feel proud that you should think so much of me as to have thought of asking me to be your wife," and she put out her hand to him. He raised it quickly to his lips, and then saying something incoherent about his wanting to see Cockney Smith's kangaroo pups, hurriedly left the room.

"That was over soon," breathed Kate, as she watched his well-set little figure striding across the paddock to Smith's humpy. "He is a gentleman, if ever there was one in the world."

"What is the matter, little one?" asked her father, as he entered the room.

"Nothing, dad. I was only looking at Mr Knowles going over to Smith's humpy to look at the new kangaroo pups."

Fraser's eyes twinkled. He guessed what had occurred. "I suppose Charlie Broome," (the bank manager at Boorala) "will be the

next, Kate. I had a letter from him this morning, saying he would be here to-morrow. You had one also, I saw."

"Oh, he is concerned about Cockney Smith's account," said Kate serenely; "that is why he is coming, now that he knows we are going away."

"Exactly," said Fraser, stroking his beard. "It's wonderful the interest he takes in Cockney Smith—an extraordinary-ordinary interest."

"Father, don't make fun of me—I can't help it. And his letter to me was so silly that I was ashamed to show it to you—I really was."

"Oh, well, I don't want to see it, my child. I've read too many love-letters when I was on the Bench—some of them so 'excessively tender,' as that old ruffian of a Judge Norbury used to say in Ireland, more than a hundred years ago, that I had to handle them with the greatest care, for fear they would fall into pieces. Now, who else is there that is going to solicit your lily-white hand—which isn't lily-white, but a distinct leather-brown—before we get away? Lacey, I suppose, will be the next."

"Not he, dad—the dear, sensible old man! He is wedded to his 'rag,' as he calls the *Clarion*. But, at the same time, I do look forward to seeing him again, and hearing his

beautiful rich brogue—especially when he is excited.”

Gerrard came to the door.

“May I come in?” he asked. His eyes were alight with subdued merriment, as he displayed an open letter. The mailman from Port Denison had just arrived.

“I have had a letter from my sister, Miss Fraser. She is leaving Sydney with my niece Mary, and coming to Ocho Rios. That is a bit of good luck for me, isn't it? And I am sure you and she and Mary will become great chums. She tells me that”—he hesitated a moment—“that as her affairs are in such a bad state she would like to come to me. And I am thunderingly glad of it. Of course she doesn't know that Ocho Rios station has gone—in a way; but by the time she gets to Somerset—three months from now—she will find a new house, and we'll all be as happy as sandboys. Now, Miss Fraser, are you ready for an hour or two's fishing? You'll come too, Fraser?”

“Won't I? Do you think I would miss the last chance of fishing in Fraser's Creek?” and the big man took down his fishing-rod and basket from a peg on the rough, timbered sides of the sitting-room.

“Fill your pipe, dad, before we start.”

“Fill it for me, Miss,” and Fraser threw

a piece of tobacco upon the table, together with his pocket-knife.

“And yours too, Mr Gerrard. I am a great hand at cutting up tobacco ; I wish I were a man, and could smoke it. Oh, Mr Gerrard, I’m ‘all of a quiver’ to know that I shall see your little Mary.”

“So am I, ‘quite a quivering,’” and then as Gerrard looked at her beautiful face, he remembered his own scarred features, and something between a sigh and a curse came from his lips.

CHAPTER XIX

As Mrs Westonley had told Gerrard in her letter that she and Mary would not leave Marumbah for quite two months and proceed direct to Somerset, where she hoped he would meet them, he decided to lose no more time at Port Denison; and so a week after the abandonment of Fraser's Gully, he and his friends found themselves on board a steamer bound to the most northern port of the colony, just then coming into prominence as the rendezvous of the pearling fleet, although Thursday Island was also much favoured.

Before leaving Port Denison, he had written to his sister, and told her that he would meet her on her arrival at Somerset. "Jim is off his head with delight," he added; "in fact we both are, at the prospect of seeing you and Mary so soon. In one way I am glad that it will be barely three months before you get to Ocho Rios, for I want to get a new house put up; the present one isn't of much account"—this was his modified way of saying that there was no house there at all, it having been reduced to ashes, but he did not wish her to have the

faintest inkling of any of his misfortunes, for fear that she would then refuse to add to his troubles and expenses by becoming a charge upon him. "And I have already bought some decent furniture, which I will take round with me in one of the pearlers. I do hope you will like the place, but you will look upon it at its very worst, for there have been heavy bush fires all about the station, which have played the deuce with the country for hundred of miles about. But the annual rains will begin to fall in four months, and then you will see it at its best. I am also going to make a garden, and plant no end of vegetables and flowers and things. There is a lovely little spot on one of the creeks; and Jim and I have been going over a thumping big box of seeds which I bought yesterday. You can consider that garden as made, with rock-melons and water-melons, and 'punkens' and other fruit growing in it galore."

When Elizabeth Westonley read the letter she smiled—the first time almost since her husband's death. "How nice of your uncle, is it not, Mary? I should miss a garden dreadfully, and it is very thoughtful of him when he has so much work to do with his cattle. And see, he has sent me a draft for one hundred pounds for our expenses up to Somerset."

"Are we very, very, poor now, Aunt?"

"Very, very poor, Mary," and she sighed. "But still it might have been much worse for us if the people to whom Marumbah now belongs had not let me keep the furniture. Mr Brooke has bought it, and paid me three hundred and fifty pounds for it. And I am sure he only did it because he was sorry for us; I am certain he does not want it."

Brooke, indeed, had been very kind to the wife of his dead friend, and had pressed her to accept a loan of money, but this she had gratefully declined.

"How glad Uncle Tom must be that he has money to send you!"

"I am sure he must be. He is always thinking of others; and you and I, Mary, must do all we can for him. I shall be housekeeper and cook and all sorts of things, and you shall be chief housemaid, and help me, and we will try and make the house look nice."

"Yes, Aunt. And won't it be lovely to see Jim again! I can just imagine his staring eyes when he sees that I have brought Bunny. You'll keep it a dead secret, won't you?"

"Quite secret. I did not even mention Bunny in my letter. Now we must go on sewing these mosquito curtains; your uncle says that in the rainy season the mosquitoes nearly eat one alive, so I am going to make

six, as I am sure he has none at Ocho Rios. He says they don't bite him, as his skin is too tough."

An hour before the steamer in which Gerrard and the Frasers had taken passage cast off her lines from the jetty, Lacey came on board to say farewell, bringing with him Mrs Woodfall. The kind-hearted woman was almost on the verge of tears as she sat down beside Jim, and folded him to her ample, motherly bosom.

Gerrard presently drew her aside, and put two five pound notes in her hand.

"Indeed I won't, sir. I like the lad too much! No, sir, not even as a present. But I do hope you won't mind his writing to us sometimes. And will you mind my saying, Mr Gerrard, that me and my husband are very sorry to hear that your station has been burned, and that you have lost nearly all your cattle. And we have taken a liberty which I hope won't offend you—it is only a present for Jim, and won't give you any trouble on board the steamer, and the freight is paid right on to Somerset, and my husband put five hundred-weight of best Sydney lucerne hay on board, so you won't have no trouble in feeding him; and, although I say it myself, there's not a better bred bull calf in North Queensland."

"Do you mean to say, Mrs Woodfall, that

you have given Jim that Young Duke bull of yours? Why, he's worth fifty pounds! Oh no, I can't allow you to be so generous as that."

"You can't help it now, Mr Gerrard," said the good woman triumphantly; "my husband brought him on board last night, and he is now in his stall on the fore-deck as happy as a king, and I hope he will prove his good blood when you once have him at Ocho Rios. Come and look at him," and she smiled with pride as she led the way out of the saloon.

The animal was comfortably established in a stall on the fore-deck, and beside him was Woodfall feeding him with the "Sydney lucerne."

"Woodfall, that bull is going ashore right away unless you take fifty pounds for him," said Gerrard; "he'll be worth five hundred pounds to me in a couple of years."

"Can't take it, Mr Gerrard. He's a present to Jim, so it's no use talking. But I would take it as a favour if you'd send me a line, and tell me how he bears the journey."

"Indeed I will, Woodfall," replied Gerrard, who was greatly touched by this practical demonstration of their regard for him; for he knew that their excuse of giving the bull to Jim was a shallow one, and that both husband and wife were aware that the animal would prove of the greatest value to him, now that

Ocho Rios was practically without cattle. And such sympathy went to his heart. "The world is full of kind people," he thought. Then he turned to Mrs Woodfall and her husband with a smile. "Come back to the saloon with me. The steamer will leave in half an hour, and we shall not have much time to talk together. And the steward is giving us tea there."

The big woman's face flushed with pleasure. "That is kind of you, Mr Gerrard. I can drink a cup of tea, but would be afraid to ask that swell steward for it; he looks like——"

"Like a duke in disguise, eh? But he'll take a shilling tip from any one, I can assure you."

"Well, I never! He ought to be ashamed of himself. English fashions are a-coming in, aren't they, Mr Gerrard? Just fancy any respectable man taking a shilling for doing the work he is paid for! Fifteen pound a month these steamer stewards get, so Mr Lacey tells me. My! But he won't get no shilling from me."

"Indeed he shall not, Mrs Woodfall. You are my guest. Now come along, please, as Miss Fraser and the others will be waiting for us."

"Mr Gerrard, isn't Miss Fraser a bonny girl—and can't she ride! I don't want to be

rude, sir, but you will have to have a mistress for Ocho Rios; and she is one of the sweetest girls in the country, and right to your hand, so to speak."

"Mrs Woodfall, you *are* surprising me. First you give Jim a bull calf worth hundreds of pounds, and then you try to fill my head with the idea that a young lady whom I have only known for a few weeks——"

"Ah, Mr Gerrard! Trust a woman for knowing things that men don't see. I saw her looking at you in the saloon—and, well, I know a thing or two."

"I am sure you do," said Gerrard laughingly, as they re-entered the saloon, "but I should have to get another face before I ask any one to marry me."

"Not at all. Why, Mr Gerrard, in a year or so all those red scars will have gone, and you'll be the nice same nutty brown all over."

"How are you, Gerrard?" said a little white-haired man in uniform. "I am glad to see you on board the *Gambier* once more. You'll share my cabin, of course?"

"Thanks, Captain MacAlister, I shall be delighted," and then the master of the steamer, after an admiring glance at Kate, and a look of wondering sympathy at the left side of Gerrard's face, hurried on deck to the bridge.

"Two big bottles of Pommery, steward; never mind the tea. Quick, please," cried Lacey to the steward; "the skipper has gone on the bridge, and we'll just have time for a doch and dorrish, Miss Fraser." The steward soon had the bottles opened.

"Gerrard, me boy, I wish you lashings of luck, and you too, Miss Fraser. Jim, my son, don't forget to write. Come, Mrs Woodfall; you really must, or I'll not speak to ye for a month. Here's to the bright eyes of the ladies! Miss Fraser, don't be after playing with any more alligators—they're nasty things for ladies to handle. Now I must be going; there's the last bell," and shaking hands all round once more, the genial Irishman left the saloon with the Woodfalls to go on shore, leaving Gerrard and his party to make their way on deck.

The engines throbbed, and the great hull of the steamer slid slowly along the pier, and Gerrard and his friends went to the rail to see the last of Lacey. He, however, for the moment did not see them, as he was hurriedly writing in his pocket-book. Then tearing out the leaf, he looked up, and pushing his way through the crowd to the edge of the pier, was just in time to reach out and place the paper in Gerrard's hand.

"Don't read it now," he cried, as he drew

back ; "put it in your pocket. Good-bye, and good luck."

A few minutes later Captain MacAlister asked Gerrard and Fraser to come up on the bridge, and Gerrard unfolded Lacey's missive and read :

"Just recognised one of your fellow-passengers—tall, stout, good-looking, yellow moustache, jewellery. Look out for him—noted card-sharper, and all-round blackguard. Calls himself Honble Wilburd Merriton. but has heaps of aliases—ex-gaol bird."

Gerrard showed the note to Fraser, who nodded, and said he had noticed the man.

"I think there is a party of them. See, there they are together at the companion ; and, by Jove, I can swear to one of them ! I tried him at Araluen for being concerned in gold-stealing, and gave him three years 'hard.' That is he with the black moustache and Jewish features—Mr Barney Green."

CHAPTER XX

Not only the saloon, but the steerage accommodation of the *Gambier* was taxed to the utmost, and Gerrard and Fraser were not surprised to see that there were quite a hundred diggers on board, for Lacey had told them a few days previously that the Sydney and Melbourne newspapers as well as the Queensland Press had, weeks previously, reported that many prospecting parties were doing well on both sides of Cape York Peninsula.

Some of them the ex-judge quickly recognised as men he had met at Gympie and other Queensland gold-fields, and he was especially pleased to see one man—a tall, broad-shouldered Irishman named Blake, who at that moment was engaged in an altercation with the fore-cabin steward, and causing roars of laughter every few moments from his rough companions.

“That’s a ‘broth av a boy,’ and no mistake,” said Captain MacAlister, coming over to Fraser and Gerrard; “he’s as full of mischief as a monkey, but a great favourite with every one on board, except the unfortunate stewards. He is a lucky digger from Gympie, and came aboard

at Brisbane, and has kept the ship in an uproar ever since. He took a four-berth state-room for himself, but only uses it to sleep in—if the devil ever does sleep—and spends all his time among the other diggers in the fore-cabin."

"I know him," said Fraser with a smile. "Just listen now—he is taking a rise out of the poor steward."

The fore-cabin steward, a fat, podgy, little man, was speaking; beside him was Cockney Smith, who kept giving him sympathetic punches in the back to go on.

"I won't 'ave it, even if yer are a cabbinger passinger. Wot do yer come into the fore-cabbing for, upsettin' me an' my men, and a-usin' langwidge when I can't open four dozen bottles of beer at onct. I never seed such a crowd! I'm allus willin' to oblige any man wot is thirsty, and wot wants a drink; but I aint a-goin' to attend on yer like a slave when I 'as cleanin' to do. So there, big as yer are, yer 'ave it—straight."

"'Ear, 'ear," said Cockney Smith, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "Who's a-goin' to be bullied by any cove because he is a cabbinger passinger?" and he gave Blake an almost imperceptible wink.

Blake outspread his huge hands and rolled up his eyes, in sorrowful indignation. "Me little mahn, I can see that ye and the steward mane to parsecute me, and make me loife a

mishery—an' me doin' no harm at all, at all. Sure, I'll not stand it anny more. It's to the captain I'll go, and complain av ye both. He's a MacAlister, he is, an' I'll call on him to purtect me from your violent conduct—me sufferin' from a wake heart, an' liable to fall dead on yez at anny moment, when yez luk at me like that, wid that ferociousness in yez eyes. Sure, an' me own father dhropped dead off the car he was drivin' whin an ould maid from Belfast gave him two sovereigns in mistake for two shillin's for takin' her from Dawson Street to St Stephen's Green. It was short-sighted she was, but it made me the poor orphan I am this minute."

Amidst much laughter, the irate steward went off, and left the field to his antagonist, and then Douglas Fraser left the bridge, made his way forward, and clapping the Irishman on the shoulder, said :

"At your old tricks again, Larry."

Blake stared at him for a moment, and then gave a shout of delight as he seized Fraser's hand, and in a few seconds other diggers also recognised and crowded about him.

"An' how's the wee girl?" was Blake's first question.

"Come and see for yourself," and Fraser led the way to the saloon, where they found Kate. She was delighted to see the big digger,

and blushed scarlet at his loudly expressed compliments, for there were a number of other passengers near. Leaving her with Blake, Fraser rejoined Gerrard, and together they went to the purser, whom they found in his cabin, and asked to see the passenger list. He was an old acquaintance of Gerrard's, and readily complied. Running down the names, they failed to see either that of Merriton or Green.

"Who is that big, good-looking man with the yellow moustache, carrying field-glasses, Adlam?" asked Gerrard carelessly.

"Oh," and the purser shrugged his shoulders. "Here he is," and he pointed to a name on the list—" 'Captain Forreste.' He's one of a party of four, who have a cabin to themselves. They put on no end of frills, and practically boss the saloon. Between ourselves, I have every reason to believe they are a gang of sharpers. I know for a fact that one of them—this fellow here, 'Mr Bernard Capel'—has a hand-bag literally packed with unopened packs of cards, every one of which no doubt is marked. I happened to be passing their state-room late at night, after all the other passengers were asleep, and when the ship was rolling heavily. The door flew open, and I saw this fellow Capel and the big man Forreste had the bag open on the table, and there must

have been at least twenty unopened packs of cards piled up on the table, besides those in the bag. I pretended I didn't notice, for the moment the door flew open, Capel called Forreste a —— idiot for not turning the key. Now, I haven't been pursering for ten years without learning something, and I can smell a swell-mobsmen almost before I see him."

Fraser nodded. "I daresay you are right, Mr Adlam. When a man travels with a hand-bag full of packs of cards one naturally would suspect that he was either very eccentric, or was a commercial traveller, with samples of his wares." His eyes twinkled. "It is a very old dodge that—an apparently unopened pack of cards, every one of which has been systematically marked, and then the wrapper with the revenue stamp is carefully put on again."

"Just so," assented the purser. "And the other night, a big digger—one of our saloon passengers—was taken down by Forreste for a hundred and twenty pounds. The great Irish ass, however, thinks that Forreste is no end of a gentleman. The skipper and I gave him a hint, which he wouldn't take, however. The worst of it is that I must keep my mouth shut about the bag full of packs of cards. Diggers are rough customers, and if these now on board knew that Forreste and his friends were a gang of sharpers, they would handle

them very severely, and create a fearful disturbance."

"What is Mr Bernard Capel like?" asked Fraser.

"Oh, a short, black-moustached chap with curly hair, and a hook nose, wears a lot of jewellery. The lady passengers think that he and Captain Forrester are most charming men."

"Who are the other two?"

"Pinkerton and Cheyne. They are as well-dressed as the others, but don't push themselves much—the other two are the bosses of the gang."

Fraser thought a moment or two. Then he spoke.

"I think I ought to tell you, Mr Adlam. I know the man who calls himself Capel. His real name is Barney Green, and he is a bad lot—gold thief and coiner. And I advise you to take good care of your safe. I daresay these four gentlemen have a very interesting collection of safe keys."

Adlam laughed. "Ah, our Company has learnt something by experience. There, you see, is the safe which is supposed to contain all the money committed to my care; but there is nothing in it but loose cash; the safe that does hold all the money is here," and he tapped the varnished cedar panels of

his bunk; "no one, even if he knew the secret, could get at it without disturbing me. When the strong room of the *Andes* was broken into five years ago, between Melbourne and Colombo, and six hundred-weight of gold bars stolen, I set my wits to work, and devised this idea of mine. Only the captain, chief officer, chief engineer, and myself, and, of course, the Company's general manager at Sydney, know of it; even my own bedroom steward has no idea that there is a second safe, although he turns out my cabin twice a week for a general cleaning. If he did discover the fact, I should have to shunt him at once, as he is quite a new hand in the service."

"Well, you have given the secret away to us, Adlam," said Gerrard, with a laugh, "and I have had some bad luck of late."

The purser laughed in unison, and then turning the key of his door, rose, went to his bunk, and touched a concealed spring in the heavy panelling at the back. It at once slid down noiselessly, and revealed the safe, about the sides of which were a number of electric wires and bells.

"The current is turned off now," he explained, as he again touched the panelling, which ascended as quickly and softly as it had fallen; "but if any one did try to prize up

the panelling, there would be a devil of a row; not only the six bells in this cabin but those in the captain's and chief mate's room would begin to ring, and keep ringing, and they and the chief engineer would know something was wrong. We have tried it several times when in dock, after clearing every one out of the ship but ourselves, and it works splendidly—kicks up a fearful din. Now, last voyage, independent of ten thousand ounces of gold in the strong room, I had seventeen thousand pounds in notes and sovereigns in that safe; this trip there is only about one thousand two hundred pounds, mostly passengers' money, and a packet of five thousand new unsigned one pound notes for the bank just opened at Cooktown. Now, I hope with four such gentry as we have on board that you and Mr Fraser will be careful; better give me your cash."

"Thank you, I will," said Fraser; "I have seven hundred pounds in notes."

"And I about three hundred pounds," said Gerrard.

"Well, go and get them now if you will," said the obliging purser.

This was done, and then the two friends, as they were returning to the bridge, met Kate.

"I have honours conferred on me, father.

Captain MacAlister is having afternoon tea in his cabin, and you, Mr Gerrard, and Jim are invited; I am to be hostess. In another hour I shall be the best hated woman on board."

CHAPTER XXI

It was past midnight, and the chief steward of the *Gambier* was taking a last glance through the empty saloon to see that everything was in order before he turned in, when Swires, the purser's bedroom steward, came to him.

"If you please, sir, the gentlemen in No. 16 send their compliments, and would be obliged to you if you will let them have their lights on full for an hour or so for a game. And they want a couple of bottles of Usher's and a dozen of soda."

"Why can't they play cards in the smoking-room on deck?" grumbled the chief steward; "there's a man on duty there until two o'clock—they know that well enough. Who's going to wait on them, and see after the lights?"

"I will, sir, if you don't mind," replied Swires, a clean-shaven, deferential young man with shifty eyes.

"Well, it's against the rules. And if the skipper or the purser comes along, and finds you loafing about in the alley-way when you

ought to be turned in, I'll get into trouble as well as yourself. Captain Forrester is a very liberal gentleman, but he puts it on a bit too thick when he asks me to run risks." But as he spoke he took out his keys, and proceeded to open his sideboard lockers—he had already received several golden tips from Captain Forrester and his friends, and felt certain of more in the future.

"I told the gentlemen, sir, that I would get into trouble if the purser or yourself seen me in the alley-way after eight bells, and they said that I might sit in their state-room until they had finished their game."

"Oh, well, I suppose I must give in to 'em. Tell 'em not to make too much noise."

As soon as Swires entered No. 16 with the whisky and sodas, Cheyne turned the key in the lock.

"Well?" asked Forrester interrogatively, as the steward laid the bottles down in one of the berths.

Helping himself to a cigar from a box on the table, the man lit it, and then sat down familiarly.

"Well," he replied, "I've found out that we are going to coal from a collier at Cooktown—that's one thing. Another is that there is a dinner-party to be given on shore to the skipper by the saloon passengers on the night

after we get there, and most likely the purser is going."

"Ah," and Capel's black beady eyes glittered, "that'll be our chance."

"Yes, we'll be coaling for about sixteen hours, beginning in the afternoon. There will be a dust screen put up just near the purser's cabin, because one of the bunker shoots is just a little for'ard of his door—see?"

"Yes," and all four men bent eagerly towards Swires.

"Well, there'll be a thundering clatter with the coals as they come pouring down from the upper deck, and that will be the time to get in, cut the wire, and do the job right away. There'll be no one this side of the dust screen after eleven at night, as most of the passengers will be ashore at the dinner, and those who don't go will be asleep."

"Supposin' the flamin' purser don't go?" said Cheyne, a small, wiry, sunburned man, who, although like his confederates was extremely well-dressed, was an exceedingly illiterate man. He was Australian born, and from his youth upward, when not occupied in horse-stealing or thimble-rigging on bush race-courses, had spent the intervening time in gaol. Pinkerton, who was an American of a somewhat similar type to Cheyne, but of a more villainous nature, was an expert burglar, and

a very fitting companion to the astute and well-educated Forrester, and the Jew, Barney Green.

"Well, what if he doesn't?" responded Swires, turning to Forrester; "you've got the stuff for me to give him in his B and S before he turns in. You're always cacklin' about it. Where is it?"

"Here you are," and Forrester went to his Gladstone bag, opened it, and took out a tin box containing a number of very small unlabelled phials, each holding about ten drops of colourless liquid. "Empty one of these into the tumbler before you put in the brandy, and he'll be dead to the world in ten minutes after he drinks it."

"I'd like to know how many flimsies there are in that packet," said Capel.

"We'll know before long," replied the steward. "It is a good big bundle. I seed the bank clerk give it to him in the saloon, and take a receipt for it, but couldn't get a look to see how much it was for."

Discussion then followed as to the future movements of the gang after the robbery, and it was decided that Capel and Cheyne should take the plunder on shore and hide it, and the following morning they should inform the purser that they intended to remain at Cooktown instead of going on in the steamer to Somerset and the newly-discovered rushes

further north. This would cause no surprise, for already a number of the diggers on board had formed a deputation to Adlam, asking him if he would make them a rebate on their passage money if they landed at Cooktown; explaining that they had learnt at Port Denison that it would be easier to get to the new gold-fields from Cooktown than from any other place to the north of that port.

Swires was to receive a fifth share of the plunder, and was to desert from the ship as soon as possible after the robbery. He had long been associated with the gang, and indeed it was at his suggestion, made in Sydney, that they should attempt to open the ship's safe. After a separation of twelve months—spent in prison—from his former companions, he had succeeded by means of an excellent “discharge,” which he had stolen from an unfortunate steward named Swires, in getting a berth on the *Gambier*, and the first thing he did was to look up Forreste and Capel, and suggest their all going to the new gold-fields, pointing out that there would be a great number of passengers on board, and that they were bound to do well.

“That is just what we meant to do,” Capel had said, “and we can wire to Cheyne and Pinkerton to join us. They are ‘working’ Bathurst just now, and will be here by to-

morrow night." Then he added that it was a bit of luck that he (Swires) should be the purser's attendant—it would give them a very fair chance of making a big haul. If, however, they did not succeed in their anticipation of perpetrating any robberies or swindling on the voyage by cards, they knew that on a new gold-field they would have glorious opportunities. Swires—who really was a ship steward—they had become acquainted with in San Francisco, and had admitted into their fraternity. For quite two years they had "worked" the mail steamers between Sydney and San Francisco, fleecing the passengers who were foolish enough to be enticed into playing with them. Sometimes there would be but two of them—with Swires—sometimes three, and they usually took their passages separately, met on board as strangers, and, being always well-dressed, and very agreeable in their manners, soon ingratiated themselves with the rest of the passengers. Their lavish manner of living and courteous attention to ladies and children always paved the way to success; but at last they became too well known, and had to change their sphere of work from the American steamers—which are always infested by sharpers—to other lines. As "the Hon. Wilburd Merriton" the chief scoundrel of the gang had travelled

all over the world, changing his name and appearance as occasion demanded. In the mining towns of California and Nevada he would be a wealthy English gentleman looking for suitable investments; on a Peninsular and Oriental liner from Melbourne to London, he would be either a college professor enjoying a twelve months' holiday trip, a squatter in the Northern Territory of South Australia, or the owner of a nitrate mine in Peru; and whatever role he played, he always succeeded in swindling some one. Women were his chief victims. His handsome appearance, fascinating manners, and easy courtesy were as fatal to a confiding woman as to the managers of banks who cashed his cheque when he was "temporarily short for a few hundreds." An excellent linguist in the principal Continental languages, he could also talk like, and assume the manners of, the rough gold-diggers with whom he so frequently associated for his nefarious purposes. Unlike his associates—the Jew, Barney Green (alias Capel), and Pinkerton and Cheyne—he had only once seen the inside of the prison, when as "the Hon. Wilburd Merriton" he was given a sentence of two years' hard labour for forgery in Auckland, New Zealand.

Lacey, who was then editing a newspaper in that somnolent little city, had seen him in the

dock, and heard something of his career ; and so, when he saw him standing on the after-deck of the *Gambier*, he had given Gerrard his hurriedly scribbled warning.

The discovery by Swires of the location of the secret safe in the purser's cabin had come about in a very simple manner. A plan of the electric connections between the dynamo in the engine-room, and Adlam's cabin and other parts of the ship, had come under his notice through the carelessness of the chief engineer, who had left it on the purser's table, and Swires had studied it so carefully that although he had not the time to make a copy, he had been able to explain the mechanism perfectly to Pinkerton and Capel. The unlocking of the door of the purser's cabin was a very easy matter to professionals like Cheyne, Pinkerton, and Barney Green, and so when their conference closed, and the oily-voiced steward bade the gang good-night, the latter were highly elated at the prospect of making a big haul with scarcely any danger of detection.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN the *Gambier* arrived at Cooktown at the mouth of the Endeavour River, a scene of the greatest activity presented itself, for several other steamers had just reached the port, some bringing European diggers from the southern colonies and New Zealand, and others from Hongkong with Chinese. The latter numbered over a thousand, and they landed amid a storm of execration and missiles from the white miners, who had preceded them to the shore. But the yellow men made no show of resistance, not even when some of their number were seized and thrown into the water with their heavily weighted baskets; they crowded together like sheep, and gazed with stolid faces at the Customs officials remorselessly capsizing their baskets upon the ground, and kicking the contents apart in the search for opium. Bags of rice were cut open and the grain spilled upon the ground, to the delight of the white diggers, especially when a tin of opium was found, and the would-be smuggler had his pigtail tied to that of another until there were several groups

of a dozen so secured to be driven to the roughly constructed jail and court-house, where justice was administered in an exceedingly expeditious manner by heavy fines. Had it not been that the angry diggers were anxious to get to the newly-discovered fields as quickly as possible, a riot would have taken place, for they knew that within a few weeks there would be thousands of Chinese alluvial diggers all over the country, enriching themselves and spending nothing, for they brought even the greater part of their food with them from China. But the fatuous Government of the day wanted to swell its depleted treasure-chest, and the Chinese poll-tax brought in money quickly. All over North Queensland the rich alluvial gold-fields were soon to be occupied by the yellow men, to the detriment of the white diggers who were hastening to them from all parts of Australasia to meet with bitter disappointment, for the swarms of Chinese would descend upon a newly opened rush like locusts, and in a few weeks work out a field that would have made hundreds of white miners rich, though perhaps each Chinaman might not have obtained more than a few ounces of gold, every penny-weight of which he sent or took back to his native country.

Amongst other passengers on the quarter-deck of the *Gambier* who were watching the examination of the Chinese were Captain

Forreste and his friends. Presently Capel, who was looking at Kate so impertinently that she turned her face angrily away, caught her father's eye, and in a moment the Jew's features flushed. Where had he seen those keen grey eyes and that square-set face before? Fraser continued to gaze steadily at the man, for he had noticed the fellow's leering glance at his daughter, and meant to resent it.

Then the Jew's natural effrontery came back to him, and returning Fraser's look with an insolent stare, he walked up to him.

"I hope you'll know me again the next time you see me."

"I know you as it is, Mr Barney Green, and the next time you dare to even look at my daughter, I'll give you something to remember. Meantime, take this as an earnest of my intentions."

His right hand shot out and seized Capel by the collar, and twisting him off his feet, he spun him round and round, and then sent him flying across the deck with such violence that he struck the rail on the other side and fell in a heap.

For a few moments there was an astonished silence, and then cries of "What is the matter?" "What did he do?" resounded on all sides as Pinkerton and Cheyne rushed to the fallen man, who lay unconscious. Forreste,

twisting his yellow moustache, strode up to Fraser, his face pale with anger.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous assault upon my friend?" he demanded fiercely.

Fraser eyed him up and down with cold contempt, and then Gerrard said with a pleasant drawl, as he stroked his beard :

"Run away and play, Mr—er—Mr—I really forget your name. Oh, Merriton, is it not?"

Forreste's face purpled with passion, and he took a step nearer to Gerrard, who was quite ready for him. Then he stopped and said hoarsely :

"My name is Forreste. I don't know yours, but I do know that if I catch you on shore I'll add some further adornment to your face."

"Oh, you contemptible creature, to say that!" and Kate looked at him with blazing eyes.

Forreste raised his immaculate Panama to her. "This is hardly a matter for a lady's interference."

"Better see to your friend for the present," said Gerrard in the same placidly pleasant manner, as he drew him aside. "But I may mention before you go that there is, on the lower deck, ample space if you wish to fulfil your promise to complete the adornment of my

prepossessing features. I am quite at your service later on in the day."

Forrester uttered an oath and turned away, and in a few minutes was in state-room No. 16, where "Mr Capel" was being brought to by his friends.

"Who is the man that did it, Barney?" was Forrester's first question.

"I didn't know him at first, but knew him quick enough when I heard him speak," replied Capel; "he's the——judge"—here he broke out into a torrent of blasphemy—"who gave me two years at Araluen."

"Ha!" and Forrester tugged his moustache. "The sooner we get that safe affair over the better. The fellow with the scarred face who is with him tackled me and called me 'Merriton.' Some one has blown upon us."

"Yes," assented the Jew, "the sooner the better." Then pouring out a glass of whisky he gulped it down. "And if I get the chance I'll get even with that Scotch swine. He's going to Somerset, and I'll get my knife into him some day. I'd not mind swinging for it."

"Don't talk rot," said Forrester, who yet knew that the Jew was a man who would not hesitate at murder, and that his expression about getting his knife into Fraser was meant in a very literal sense. "I mean to get even

with my man if I come across him again. But I won't be such a fool as to attempt it here. Take a look outside and see if Snaky is about."

"Snaky" was the name by which Swires was known to the gang—and the Australian police; and in a few minutes that worthy appeared, and a further conference was held.

That evening, whilst Captain MacAlister was being entertained on shore, a collier came alongside, and the *Gambier* began to coal. Those of the saloon passengers who had remained on board sat under the after-deck awning, where they were not only secure from the invading coal dust, but where they could enjoy the cool sea-breeze. Among them were Kate and Jim, who had made themselves comfortable in two cane lounges, and at various parts of the quarter-deck were groups of passengers—principally ladies—who were glad to escape from the confined atmosphere of the saloon, and intended to sleep in the open air. Gerrard and Fraser had gone on shore, leaving Jim "in charge of Kate," as Fraser had said.

At the extreme stern were Captain Forrester, Pinkerton, two or three other men, and several ladies, and from this group came much laughter, the "captain" being in great good humour,

and winning the ladies' smiles by his skill as a *raconteur*.

"And so you are deserting us to-morrow morning, Captain Forrester," cried a vivacious young matron; "it is too bad of you. The rest of the voyage will be dreadfully *triste*—for me at any rate." Every one laughed.

The gallant captain smiled winningly. "Ah, Mrs Marriott, do not make me vain. Yes, we are going to leave you. In fact we should have all gone ashore this evening, but my unfortunate friend, Mr Capel, is not yet fully recovered from the brutal attack to which he was subjected."

"It was most disgraceful and wicked," chimed in a second lady.

"And cowardly as well," added a fat, sleepy-faced dame. "I believe poor Mr Capel was taken quite by surprise."

"And the way that horrid girl flew at you!" said Mrs Marriott; "but her father being such a horrible bully I suppose she has inherited some of his disposition. She is certainly pretty in a coarse kind of a way, I admit, but terribly *gauche*. And I really am quite angry with Captain MacAlister—he positively *trots* after her. She is continually on the bridge with him, and yet he has refused to permit any other ladies to go there, ever since we left Sydney. I think it is scandalous,

for I know that Captain MacAlister is a married man with grandchildren."

The hours passed by, and then at eleven o'clock, to the anger of Forrester, Adlam sauntered up. He had been to the dinner, but had left early. Seating himself beside Kate and Jim, he pulled the boy's ear.

"So you are taking care of Miss Fraser, eh, Jim? Lucky man!"

"Just listen to that now!" said the fat lady to Mrs Marriott. "One would think that Mr Adlam would have more sense than to flatter that girl's vanity. He has quite deserted us since she came on board at Port Denison."

Kate, serenely unconscious of the criticisms being passed upon her, was listening to the purser's description of the excited state of Cooktown, when Swires appeared, and said to Adlam:

"When are you turning in, sir?"

"In a few minutes, Swires. You can leave my nip and bottle of soda on the table. I shall not want you any more to-night."

"Very good, sir."

Adlam remained with Kate a few minutes longer, then said good-night, and went to his cabin. Swires, as usual, had placed a tumbler with some brandy in it on the table, and beside it lay the soda. The purser took off his clothes, and got into his thinnest pyjamas,

for the cabin was close ; but he had made up his mind to stay in his cabin that night, for the sole reason that he was now very suspicious of Captain Forreste and his party, and had made up his mind to suffer the discomfort of a hot cabin, and the noise of the coaling going on as long as they were on board. Forreste had told him in the afternoon that he and his party were staying at Cooktown, much to his satisfaction.

Eight bells struck, and then noise of the falling coals suddenly ceased—the lumpers were taking the usual half-hour “spell.” Adlam opened the soda, and the listening Swires heard the pop of the cork, and stole softly into No. 16, where he found the gang awaiting him.

“Well, he’s taken his B and S,” he said, “and that finishes my part of the contract.” (Earlier in the evening he and Pinkerton had opened Adlam’s door, and the latter had quickly cut the electric communication of the secret safe. The opening of it later on would not be a difficult matter to such an expert as the American.)

“And we’ll do ours presently,” said Capel, who was now quite recovered. “How long will that dose keep him quiet?” he asked of Forreste.

“Two hours. As soon as you have the

work done, Pinky and Cheyne can take the stuff on shore. I've told the chief steward that we had all thought of going for a stroll on the beach, but that I did not care about leaving Mr Capel, and that as our cabin is not very hot, we should not sleep on deck. When will the coaling start again, Snaky?"

"Twenty minutes or so."

"Very well. We'll wait until one o'clock, eh, Barney?"

The Jew nodded, and then Swires left them, and Forrester put out the electric light.

About half-past one Pinkerton and Cheyne appeared on the after-deck, and sauntered up and down for a few minutes. There were several other male passengers still awake, and with these the two men exchanged a few words.

"Will you come with us for a stroll on the beach?" said Pinkerton to a sleepy man who was lying on the skylight.

"No jolly fear; I'm too comfy as I am, and I know what the mosquitoes are on Cooktown beach."

Cheyne made some laughing rejoinder, and then he and his companion went to the gangway and walked leisurely along the jetty. An hour or so later they returned, and settled themselves comfortably with pillows on one of the long deck seats.

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In state-room No. 16 Forrester and Capel were conversing in angry, whispered tones.

"How was I to know that he hadn't taken your cursed dose?" snarled the Jew; "and what else could I do but settle him when he awoke? Anyway, we have nothing to be afraid of. We have got the stuff, and by this time Pinky and Cheyne have it safely planted, and there will be no evidence to connect us with the job. Curse you! what are you funk-ing it for? We'll be on shore at five o'clock, the steamer leaves at six, and the purser is never called until seven; and when he is called and doesn't answer, they won't break open his door for at least two or three hours. And by this time he has fifty tons of coal on top of him, and there's more coming down every minute. Listen!"

Forrester, criminal as he was, was not so callous as Green, and shuddered as he heard the coals rattling down into the bunkers.

"Was he quite dead when you dropped him down into the bunker?" he asked, as with shaking hand, he poured some whisky into a tumbler.

"Dead as you will be some day, you white-livered cur!" said the Jew with savage contempt. Then opening the port, he dropped Pinkerton's burglar's tools over into the water. "There! there goes Pinky's kit. All we have

to do now is to go on deck—you to blarney with the women, who are awake, and me to play the interesting invalid who was subjected to a violent and unprovoked attack," and he leered evilly.

CHAPTER XXIII

"WELL, Lizzie, how does the Ocho Rios country strike you?" and Gerrard pulled up his horse under the grateful shade of a great Leichhardt tree standing on the bank of a clear, sandy-bottomed creek.

"I think it is beautiful, Tom, almost tropical, especially anywhere near the sea," and Mrs Westonley jumped lightly from her horse. "Are we going to spell here for awhile?"

"Yes. Here come Jim and Mary with the pack-horse, and as it is past twelve, we'll have our dinner, rest an hour, and then take the beach way home."

Eight months had passed since Mrs Westonley and Mary had come to Ocho Rios, and they had been eight months of work and happiness to them all, for the fortunes of Gerrard had changed greatly, and he was now in a fair way of becoming a prosperous man again. The numerous gold discoveries had brought a great inrush of diggers, and cattle for killing were now worth four times the price they had been a year before. He had built his new house, which

was ready and actually furnished when his sister and Mary arrived at Somerset, where he had met them. Together they had ridden across the peninsula, through the dry, parched-up bush so lately devastated by fire, and when Ocho Rios was reached, the country was certainly looking at its worst, as he had mentioned in his letter. But since then glorious rains had fallen, and no one not acquainted with the marvellous changes produced by copious rains in a tropical land, would believe that the shady Leichhardt tree under which Gerrard and his sister were camped had four months previously been withered and scorched by the great fire which had swept across the peninsula.

The name of "Ocho Rios" had been given to the station by the man who had first taken up the block of country for a cattle-run. He was an ex-Jamaican sugar planter, whose estate had been situated in the Ocho Rios (Eight Rivers) district of that beautiful island; and who had been ruined by the emancipation of the negroes in 1838. And, as his new possession was in the vicinity of eight small creeks flowing westward into the Gulf of Carpentaria, he had given it the same name.

"How far are we from the sea now, Uncle Tom?" asked Mary, as she and Jim rode up leading the pack-horse.

"About seven miles or so. Ever seen mango trees, Mary?"

"No, Uncle Tom, but Aunt Lizzie has, and says that mangoes are lovely. She ate some at Point de Galle, when she was a little girl going to England. Didn't you, Aunt?"

Mrs Westonley smiled, and looked at Gerrard inquiringly, wondering what had made him ask the question. He had a way of "springing" pleasant surprises upon people. When she came to the new bark-roofed house at Ocho Rios, she had never expected to find anything but the common chairs and tables, usually to be seen on cattle stations in the Far North. Certainly Tom had told her in his letter that he had bought "some decent furniture" at Port Denison, and she had smiled to herself, thinking of what the difference would be between her ideas and his of what was "decent furniture." And her heart had gone out to him when she—then knowing what she had not dreamt of before, that he was a ruined man—saw what he had bought for her out of his slender purse.

"Tom," she had cried, "why did you go to such expense? And that piano too! I shall hardly have the heart to play upon it, knowing what——"

"You are going to play to-night after dinner. That piano will become famous. It is the first

thing of the kind ever seen on Cape York Peninsula. You should have seen the skipper of the pearling lugger at Somerset stare when he saw the thing swing out of the hold of the *Gambier*. It will be a great thing for you and Mary."

"Indeed it will, Tom. For her sake alone I must rejoice."

Four months after his return to the station Gerrard was delighted to receive a visit from Douglas Fraser and Kate. They, with Sam Young, and the rest of Fraser's old hands, were on one of the new rushes about ninety miles from Ocho Rios, and were, Fraser said, doing very well, together with some fifty other white diggers, and several hundreds of Chinese. Amongst other news the ex-judge told Gerrard something that had pleased him greatly.

"You'll be glad to hear that Adlam is thoroughly recovered," he said, "I saw a paragraph about him in a *Brisbane Courier*, two months old, which the new sub-Inspector of Black Police gave me last week. The poor fellow had a most marvellous escape."

Adlam had indeed had a marvellous escape from a dreadful death. When the treacherous "Snaky" Swires had heard the pop of the soda water in the purser's cabin, he had naturally concluded that Adlam had poured it into the glass containing the drugged brandy; but as

a matter of fact Adlam had drunk the soda water alone, for he thought he had taken quite enough champagne—and other liquid refreshment as well—at the dinner to MacAlister, and wanted to rise earlier than usual in the morning with a clear head. When Pinkerton and Capel entered his cabin, he was not quite asleep, and had turned in his berth as he heard his door close softly, and the next instant the American had seized him by the throat, and the Jew dealt him a blow on the temple with a slung shot. After that he remembered nothing more.

When Capel and Pinkerton dropped his unconscious figure down into the bunker, he had rolled down the inclined heap of coals to the bottom, where half an hour later he was discovered by the half-drunken coal trimmers, who at once summoned the chief engineer, and Adlam was carried to his cabin, Swires opening the door with the duplicate key he was allowed to possess. There was nothing in the cabin to give rise to any suspicion—everything was in the usual order; and it was naturally concluded that the purser had fallen down into the bunkers in the darkness, and had struck his head, or that a heavy piece of fallen coal had inflicted the terrible blow. No doctor was available, and for many days he hovered between life and death, unable to speak. It was only after the steamer arrived at Somerset that medical

assistance was obtained, and that Captain MacAlister opened the safe, and found it rifled of all the cash it had contained—the bundle of unsigned notes Adlam had given to the bank manager within an hour after the steamer's arrival at Cooktown. Poor Adlam, still unconscious, was sent to Brisbane. The disappearance of Swires led to the belief that he was the perpetrator of the robbery, but Adlam, still unable to speak, could not give any information on the subject. Gerrard and Fraser, however, told the captain all they knew of Captain Forreste and his friends, and in due time they were arrested at one of the mining camps and brought back to Cooktown, charged with being concerned in the affair. But there was not a tittle of evidence against them, and they were discharged.

Another matter which had pleased Gerrard was that he had heard that Randolph Aulain with a party of three, was working the head waters of the little creek running into the Batavia, on which both he and Gerrard had found gold, and that they had washed out some thousands of ounces. But Aulain's expectation of being able to secure the usual Government reward for the discovery of a payable and permanent gold-field was not realised; the Mining Warden had reported adversely upon it as regarded the latter essential

qualification. Gerrard felt some surprise that Aulain had not come to see him, for the "place with a hunking big boulder standing in the middle of a deep pool," was only eighty miles from Ocho Rios. But then, upon second thoughts, he concluded that the *auri sacra fames* had seized his friend too thoroughly in its grip—as it always does the amateur digger, especially when he strikes upon very rich auriferous country, as was the case in this instance. And his surmise was correct, for Aulain was working madly to become rich and win Kate, and had no thought of aught else.

“Here are the mangoes, Mary,” said Gerrard, as two hours after leaving their camp under the great Leichhardt tree, the party drew rein before a grove of fifty or more of the beautiful trees; “these escaped the big fire. See, the clusters of fruit are almost ripe. In another week or so they will be fit to eat, and then you’ll see all the winged insects and the ‘bitiest’ ants in the universe here in millions, feeding upon them. The niggers like them too. About four years ago a mob of myalls came here and stripped every tree, and I did not mind it very much. But two days after that, they killed and ate two of my stockmen, and Inspector Aulain gave them a terrible punishment.”

He stood up in his saddle, broke off a cluster of the reddening fruit, and tossed them to Jim. "Put them in your saddle pouch, Jim, and when we get home wrap them in a piece of damp blanket; they'll be ripe in a couple of days. Now, come on, Lizzie, we can ride along the beach for another five miles. I want to show you the old Dutch ship buried in the sand. Some day I mean to dig her out, and find millions of treasure—eh, Jim? Like the story-books, you know."

And then, as the first red glories of the nearing sunset spread its blades of softened fire upon the sleeping waters of the Gulf, they cantered along the hard, yellow sand.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUMMER had come and gone, and come again before Gerrard received a visit from Aulain. Early one scorching, hot morning, however, he rode up to the station, leading a pack-horse, and found his friend busy in the branding yard with Jim, and some white and aboriginal stockmen. Gerrard was delighted to see him, and at once ceased his work of branding calves.

"Come to the house, Aulain. My sister will be so pleased to see you. Jim, take Mr Aulain's horses to the stable, give them a wash down, and then turn them out into the river bank paddock."

"No, don't do that, Gerrard," said Aulain; "I can't stay for the night. I want to push on to—to"—he hesitated a moment,—“towards Black Bluff Creek.”

"Nonsense, man! It's ninety miles from here, and you can't get there before to-morrow night, although your horse looks pretty fit for another twenty miles or so. What is the earthly use of your camping out to-night? I'll take it very badly, I can tell you, and my sister will feel greatly hurt."

The ex-inspector began to protest, but Gerrard would not listen, and so Aulain allowed himself to be overruled. As they walked to the house, Gerrard could not but notice that his friend seemed very much changed in his manner. He spoke slowly and constrainedly, and looked at least five years older than he was when Gerrard had last seen him at Port Denison.

"Fever been troubling you again, Aulain?" he said sympathetically, as he placed his hand on his shoulder.

Aulain gave a nod. "Oh, nothing very bad. I get a pretty stiff turn now and again, but there's nothing like hard work to shake it off when you feel it coming on."

"Just so. How's the claim going—well, I hope?"

"It's worked out now. But my three mates and I have done very well out of it. We have taken out four thousand five hundred ounces in a year and eight months. We sent the gold away by the escort last week, and our camp is broken up. My mates have gone off in various directions to other diggings."

"And you?"

"Oh, I thought I would see what the new field near Cape Grenville was like. I hear that it is very patchy, but any amount of rich pockets. And as Black Bluff Creek is on my

way, I thought I would pay Fraser a visit, and see how he is doing. Do you know?"

"Very well indeed."

"Is he?" and Gerrard was quick to notice the gloomy look that came into Aulain's eyes, and wondered thereat.

"I am so glad to meet you at last, Mr Aulain," said Mrs Westonley, as the two men entered the cool sitting-room. "Tom has a just grievance against you for not coming to see him when you were only eighty miles from us. Almost every day for the past year he has been expecting to see you. But I suppose that washing out gold is too fascinating a pursuit, and that you could not drag yourself away."

Aulain smiled. "You are quite right in one way, Mrs Westonley, but wrong in another. I should have come to Ocho Rios six months ago, but all our horses died from eating poison bush, and it was only a few weeks ago that my mates and I were able to buy some from a drover, who was taking a mob down to Cooktown."

During lunch the ex-inspector brightened up somewhat, and once smiled when Mrs Westonley, in alluding to the several visits made by Kate Fraser to Ocho Rios, said that Jim had fallen violently in love with her, whereupon the lad laughed, and said he was

only as much in love with her as were Uncle Tom and Mary. Gerrard, who of course knew of Aulain's rejection by Kate, was at that moment wondering whether his friend meant to again "try his luck" or had quite got over the affair, and joined heartily in the general laugh that followed Jim's remark.

"I think she is a delightful girl, Mr Aulain," said Mrs Westonley; "and I am looking forward to her next visit. She spent a fortnight with us the last time, and we felt quite dull and humdrum after she had gone home to her father."

Aulain raised his brows slightly, and enquired if Miss Fraser had come all that distance alone. Surely she would not be so rash!

"Oh, no! She knows how bad these Cape York blacks are, and would not be so reckless of her life as to come alone. Mr Fraser came with her the first time, then one of her father's mates was her next escort, and the last time Tom and Jim went to the Bluff for her, and also went back with her."

A fleeting shadow crossed the dark handsome face, but beyond saying that the blacks were now not so bold as they were two years ago, he apparently did not take much interest in Miss Fraser's visits to Ocho Rios. But already his ever suspicious mind was at work about her and Gerrard.

After lunch, as there was more branding to be done, Gerrard went back to the stockyard. Aulain wished to come and help.

"Indeed you shall not, Aulain. I'll tell you what you ought to do. You were saying that you felt inclined for a sea bathe when you camped last night and heard the surf beating on the beach. Now, you and Jim go and have a jolly good swim in the surf. Jim will show you a place safe from sharks."

"I can't resist that," said Aulain eagerly. It was just the very thing he wished—to have a talk with Jim. "But I know the place you mean, Gerrard. My troopers and I have often bathed there when I was in charge of the N.P. Camp at Red Beach."

Jim ran off to catch and saddle a couple of horses, for although the bathing place was only three miles distant, no Australian would walk so far (except to catch a horse) when he could ride.

"Take your fishing-line, Jim," said Mrs Westonley, when he returned leading the horses, "and catch some bream for supper. No, Mary, certainly not—you cannot go. No, not even to help Jim to catch and clean the fish. This is a terrible girl, Mr Aulain," and with a smile she drew Mary to her. "I know exactly what she wants to do—ride into the surf and get wet through."

"Aunt, you *are* a wonder. However did you guess?" and Mary, now almost as tall as Jim, hugged Mrs Westonley's slender waist; "that's exactly what I did mean to do. But I also meant to catch fish as well."

"Then you can 'catch' me some guinea-fowl eggs instead, to make egg and bread-crumble to fry the fish. Mr Aulain, do you know that Tom brought some guinea-fowl from Port Denison, and now we have hundreds of them? They are horrid things, though. Instead of laying in the fowl-house in an ordinary Christian fowl-like way, they go miles away, and of course the carpet snakes and iguanas, and kookaburras,¹ get most of the eggs and chicks—except those which Jim and Mary find."

Aulain laughed as he swung his light, wiry figure into his saddle, and then he and Jim cantered off.

A few hours later, as he and the lad were returning to the station, he lit his pipe and said:

"So your aunt doesn't care about the beach, and the sea, and the old Dutch ship buried in the sand, eh, Jim?"

"No, Mr Aulain. She says she cannot look at the sea without shuddering—it always makes her think of her father and mother, and the

¹ Laughing jackasses.

wreck of the *Cassowary*. But Uncle Tom and Miss Fraser like the beach, and always went there in preference to anywhere else when they went for a ride."

Poor Jim, never for one moment imagining the cause of Aulain's interest in Miss Fraser's movements, was then led on by him to relate nearly everything that had occurred at the station during her last visit. "Was she fond of fishing?" Aulain asked. "Oh, yes, and so was Uncle Tom. They would go out nearly every day either to the beach for bream, or up one of the creeks for spotted mullet."

Sometimes he (Jim) and Mary would go with them, and then it would be a regular all-day sort of fishing and shooting picnic. Miss Fraser used to shoot too, and Uncle Tom was teaching her to shoot from the left shoulder as well as the right—like he could. Then he went on to say that next time Kate came to Ocho Rios she, Gerrard and Mary and himself were all going to Duyphen Point, where there was a small coco-nut grove.

"It will be grand, won't it, Mr Aulain? You see we are going to take two pack-horses, and our guns and fishing-lines, and will camp there for three or four days and come back with a load of coco-nuts."

"It ought to be splendid, Jim. When is it to be?"

"In about a month. Miss Fraser is coming to stay with aunt for three whole months. Uncle Tom and I are going to Black Bluff Creek for her, if Mr Fraser can't spare the time to come with her. You see, it's ninety miles, and you can't do it in one day, because some of the country is very rough, and none of our horses have ever been shod. Look at this colt's hoofs," and he pointed to them; "ain't they an awful size?—real 'soft country' hoofs, and no mistake."

Aulain gave a short nod, and then became silent, scarcely noticing Jim's further remarks concerning such interesting subjects as kangarooing, alligator-shooting, the big tribe of cannibal niggers on the Coen River, who had killed and eaten sixteen Chinamen diggers, etc., etc.

For the rest of the day he was, Gerrard and Mrs Westonley noticed, very restless, and the former observed with some surprise that he helped himself freely and frequently to the brandy; hitherto he had known him as a somewhat abstemious man in the matter of liquor.

He left soon after daylight, declining Gerrard's pressing invitation to stay for breakfast on the ground of wishing to "do a good twenty miles before the cursed sun got too hot," and somehow the master of Ocho Rios was not sorry to say good-bye to

him, for his manner seemed to have undergone a very great, and not pleasant change.

"Take care of the niggers, Aulain," he said as they parted.

The ex-officer smiled grimly, and he touched the Winchester carbine slung across his shoulder. Then leading his pack-horse, he rode away.

CHAPTER XXV

"OH, men who have, or have had fever as badly as Aulain has, often act very queerly, Lizzie, so don't be too hard on him."

"I know that, Tom. But at the same time there is something about him—those strange eyes of his—that made me afraid of him. When I told him last night that Kate Fraser was coming here on a long visit, he did not answer; his eyes were fixed on your face in such a strange, intense look that it made me feel quite 'creepy.'"

Gerrard laughed. "Were they? I didn't notice it."

"No, of course not. You were too busy showing Jim how to unscrew the nipples of his gun, and perhaps did not even hear what I was saying."

"Oh, I did. But I didn't make any comment, as I noticed that at supper, whenever you or I spoke of the Frasers, he answered in curt monosyllables."

"Did you tell him she was coming here next month?"

"No. I daresay I should have done so if I had thought of it."

"Tom, I am not a female Lavater, but when I saw him looking at you like that, I disliked and distrusted him."

"Poor Aulain! Why, Lizzie, he's one of the straightest fellows that ever lived, and I am sure he has a sincere regard for me. You must never take notice of the queer looks and actions of men who have had fever badly."

"Tom! I'm a woman, and I know. He was thinking of Kate Fraser—and you. And he is suffering from another fever—the fever of violent jealousy."

Gerrard looked up—they were at breakfast. "Well, if that is the case, it is a bad complication of diseases, and I am sorry for him. He has no earthly reason to be jealous of me."

"He *is* jealous, Tom, 'deadly jealous,' as Jim would say, and I dislike him, dislike him intensely for it. You have been so good to him, too."

"Only keeping things quiet about Big Boulder Creek, as I promised him I should. And then, you see, Lizzie, his not getting the Government reward of five thousand pounds, as he thought he should, has been a big disappointment to him."

Mrs Westonley rose, came over to him,

and placed her two hands against his bronzed cheeks.

"Thomas Gerrard, Esquire?"

"Mrs Elizabeth Westonley!"

"You are to marry Kate Fraser!"

"Am I, old woman? You're a perfect jewel of a sister to find me such a charming wife. But you see there are one or two trifling formalities to be observed. First of all, I should have to ask her her views on the subject."

"You ought to have done that a year ago."

"And have met with a refusal like poor Forde and Aulain."

"No, you would *not* have been refused. I know that much," was his sister's emphatic observation. "But you are letting the time go by, Tom. And I am sure she is wondering why you don't ask. I know that she loves you."

"Do you really?" and he shook his head smilingly.

"Yes, I do. I'm certain. And I know you are fond of her."

"Been long in the clairvoyant business, Lizzie?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Tom. I am very serious—and it would make me very happy. Ask her this time, Tom. You must—else

you have no right to be with her so much. It is not fair to the girl."

"We are very great friends, Lizzie. I like her better than any woman I have ever met. And I have sometimes thought — but anyway, I'm not in a position to ask her."

"Nonsense! Your affairs are improving every day."

Gerrard was silent for a minute, then he said:

"I think Aulain means to try again."

"I am sure of it. But he is wasting his time. High-spirited as she is, she is almost frightened of him. She told me so. She resented very much a letter she received from him in reply to hers telling him she could not marry him; and moreover she told me that even if she cared ever so much for a man, she would never marry a Roman Catholic."

"I don't think she will ever marry, Lizzie, so it is no use my indulging in ridiculous visions; she is too much attached to her father to ever leave him. And you will always be mistress of Ocho Rios and master of Tom Gerrard."

Mrs Westonley laughed, and pulled his short, dark - brown, pointed beard. "Silly

man! I know better than that; and I know also that Douglas Fraser would be pleased to see Kate become Mrs Tom Gerrard, for he likes you immensely. Now, promise me you will ask her?"

Gerrard rose and made his escape to the door, then he turned.

"I'll think it over, you match-making creature," and then he went off to the stock-yard, apparently unconcerned, but secretly delighted at what his sister had told him, and she smiled to herself, for she knew that when he spoke of thinking about a matter, he had already decided.

Black Bluff Creek was a purely alluvial gold-field, and was in the very zenith of its prosperity when, towards sunset, Randolph Aulain looked down upon it from an iron-stone ridge a mile distant from the workings. It had been given its name on account of a peculiar formation of black rock, which rose abruptly from the alluvial plain, and extended for nearly two miles along and almost parallel with the creek, from the bed of which so much gold was being won by two hundred diggers. The top of this wall of rock was covered with a dense scrub, and presented a smooth, even surface of green, which even

in the driest seasons never lost its verdant appearance. Some of the diggers had cleared away portions of the scrub, and erected sun-shelters of bark, under which they slept when their day's toils were over, and enjoyed the cool night breeze—free from the miasmatic steam of the valley five hundred feet below. Almost on the verge of the steep-to wall of rock was a large and regularly built "humpy," in which Douglas Fraser and Kate lived. The ascent to the summit of the bluff was by a narrow path that had been found by Kate in one of the many clefts riven in the side of the black-faced cliff, and her father's mates had so improved it with pick and shovel that Aulain could discern it quite easily.

As he walked his horse down into the camp, the diggers had just ceased work for the day, and with clay-stained and soddened garments were returning to their various tents or "humpies" of bark, all of them contentedly smoking, and ready for their usual supper of salt beef, damper, and tea. Many of the stalwart fellows recognised the ex-officer of Black Police, and bade him a pleasant "good evening, boss," and presently he was hailed by Sam Young, Cockney Smith, and others of Fraser's party. He

dismounted and shook hands with Young, and asked him where was the "pub," as he intended to put up there for the night.

Young protested against his going there. "There it is, Mr Aulain, over there," and he pointed to the bush public house, a low, bark-roofed structure on the edge of the creek; "but you can't stay there to-night. It's Saturday, you see, and the boys will be there in force to-night, and you'll get no sleep. Besides, Mr Fraser would be real put out if you didn't go to him. He's just gone home. He and Miss Kate live up on the bluff."

"I know. I'll go and see them after supper, but I'd rather camp down here for to-night."

"Then come to our tent. There's plenty of room, and plenty of tucker, and any amount of grass along the creek for your horses."

Aulain accepted the offer, and after unsaddling and turning out his horses, he was provided with a piece of soap, an alleged towel, and a bucket of water, and made a hasty wash in company with Young and his mates. Then came supper and the interchange of the usual mining news. Two years before, not one of his present companions would have addressed him without the prefix of "Mister";

but now he was one of themselves, a digger, and would himself have felt awkward and uncomfortable if any one of them had had the lack of manners and good sense to "Mister" him.

Supper over he lit his pipe, and telling Young he would be back about ten and take a hand at euchre, he set out and took the mountain path to the summit of the bluff. It was a beautifully clear moonlight night—so clear that every leaf of the trees which stood on the more open sides of the rocky track showed out as if it were mid-day, and a bright sun was shining overhead.

When he was within sight of Fraser's dwelling, he heard two shots above him, and then Kate speaking.

"I've got four of the little villains, father."

The sound of her voice thrilled him, and he hastened his steps. In a few minutes he saw Douglas Fraser, who was seated outside smoking his after-supper pipe.

"How are you, Fraser?" he cried.

The big man sprang to his feet, and came towards him with outstretched hand.

"Aulain, by Jove! I *am* pleased to see you again. I saw some one leading a pack-horse coming into the camp below, but never dreamt it was you. Come inside. Kate will be here

in a few minutes. We have a bit of garden close by, and the confounded bandicoots and paddymelons ravage it at nights, and she has just been knocking some over. She will be delighted to see you."

CHAPTER XXVI

KATE was *not* pleased to see Aulain, but did not show it; for she guessed why he had come, and could not but feel a little frightened. But after a little while she felt more at her ease, when he began to tell her father and herself of his mining experiences, and said laughingly that malarial fever was not half as bad as gold fever.

"You see," he said, turning to Kate, "the one only takes possession of your body: the other takes your soul as well. The more gold you get, the more you want; and one does not feel that he has a corporeal existence at all when he turns up a fifty or sixty ounce nugget—as I did on three or four occasions. You feel as if you belonged to another—a more glorious world; and before you, you see the open, shining gates of the bright City of Fortune."

The grizzled ex-judge laughed. "You have missed your vocation in life, Aulain. Man, you're a poet. But I know the feeling, and so does Kate. Well, I am pleased that you have had such luck."

"And so am I," said Kate incautiously, "and I wish you better luck still at the new rush at Cape Grenville; but I think what has pleased me most, Mr Aulain, is that you have left the Native Police. Do you know that when the escort was here a few weeks ago with ten black troopers, and your successor came here to see us, I could hardly be civil to him, although he was very nice, and gave us some very late newspapers—only two months old."

"The Black Police are certainly your *bêtes noire*, Kate," said her father with a smile, as he pushed the bottle of whisky towards his guest.

"They are, dad. They are very especial black beetles to me—beetles with Snider rifles and murderous tomahawks for shooting and cutting down women and children."

Aulain's dark face flushed, and Kate reddened too, for she was sorry she had spoken so hastily. Then, to her relief, there sounded a sudden outburst of barking from Fraser's kangaroo dogs.

"Oh, those horrid paddymelons and bandicoots at the garden again!" and she rose and seized her gun.

"May I come and have a shot, too?" said Aulain.

"Do. It is as clear as noon-day. Take father's gun, Mr Aulain. I have plenty of cartridges in my pocket."

They stepped out together into the brilliant moonlight, and then Kate, driving the dogs away, led the way to the garden—a small cleared space enclosed with a brush fence. Peering over the top, the girl saw more than a dozen of the energetic little rodents busily engaged in their work of destruction. Indicating those at which she intended to fire, she motioned to Aulain to shoot at a group which were further away, and occupied in rooting up and devouring sweet potatoes. They fired together, and three or four of the creatures rolled over, dead. The rest scampered off.

"They will come back in ten or fifteen minutes," said Kate; "shall we wait? See, there is a good place, under that silver leaf ironbark, where it is rather dark. There is a log seat there."

Aulain eagerly assented. This would give him the opportunity to which he had been looking forward.

As soon as they were seated he took Kate's gun from her hand, and leant it with his own against the bole of the tree.

"Kate," he said, speaking very quickly, "I am glad to have this chance of speaking to you

alone. I want to ask your forgiveness for that letter I wrote when——”

“I did forgive you, long ago, Randolph. I was very, very angry when I read it, and I daresay you too were angry when you wrote such cruel things to me, but then”——and she smiled——“you have such a very hasty temper.”

He placed his hand on hers. “Only you can chasten it, Kate. And now you know why I have come to Black Bluff.”

“It is very good of you, Randolph, but, as I have said, I forgave you long ago, and I am sorry that you have come so far just to tell me that you are sorry for what occurred, although both father and I are sincerely glad to see you.”

“Ah, Kate! You don’t understand what I mean. In asking for your forgiveness I ask for your love. I came here to ask you to be my wife.”

“Don’t, please, Randolph,” and she drew herself away from him. “I cannot marry you. I like you—I always liked you—but please do not say anything more.”

“Kate,” and the man’s voice shook, “you cared for me once. Forget my mad, angry letter, and——”

“I *have* forgotten it. Did I not say so? But please do not again ask me to marry you,

Come, let us go back to the house. You will only make me miserable—or else angry.”

“Why have you changed so towards me?” he asked quickly.

“I have not changed in any way towards you,” she answered emphatically with a slight accent of anger in her tones. “Please do not say anything more. Let us go in,” and she rose.

“Kate,” he said pleadingly, and he placed his hand on her arm gently, “just listen to me for a minute. I love you. I will do all that a man can to make you happy. I have left the Native Police, and I am now fairly well off——”

She made a swift gesture. “For your sake I am pleased—very pleased—that you have left the Police, and have made money. But, Randolph,” and though she was frightened at the suppressed vehemence in his voice, and the almost fierce look of his dark, deep-set eyes, she smiled as she put her hand on his, “please don’t think that—that—money, I mean—would make any difference to me. Come, let us go back to father. I am sure he wants you to play chess.”

Aulain’s face terrified her. He had lost control of himself, and his hand closed around her wrist.

"So you throw me over?" he said in almost savage tones.

"'Throw you over'! How dare you say such a thing to me!" and she tore her hand away from him, and faced him with blazing anger in her eyes. "What have I ever said or done that you can speak to me like this?"

"I know who has come between us——"

"'Between us'! What do you mean?" she cried scornfully. "What has there ever been 'between us'? And who do you mean?"

Aulian's face whitened with the anger of jealousy, and he gave full vent to the unreasoning passion which had now overmastered him.

"I mean Gerrard."

"Mr Gerrard—your friend?" she said slowly.

"Yes," he replied with a sneer; "my dear friend Gerrard—the man who, professing to be my friend, has steadily undermined me in your regard ever since he first saw you."

"Your mind is wandering, I fear," and the icy contempt with which she spoke brought his anger to white heat. "I shall stay here no longer, Mr Aulain," and she stepped over to the tree, and took up her gun. Aulain was beside her in an instant.

"Do you think I do not know?" he said thickly, and the gleam of passion in his eyes

struck terror to her heart, "It was he who made you leave Fraser's Gully to come here, so as to be near him. At first I thought that it was that Scotch hound of a parson—but now I know better."

Kate flushed deeply, then she whitened with anger. "Oh, I wish I were a man! I could strike you as it is! Ah, you should never have left the Black Police. I shall not fail to let the man who befriended you know how you have vilified him."

"You need not. I will tell him myself what I have told you. By —— he shall suffer for robbing me of you!" and it needed all Kate's courage to look into his furious eyes.

"Good-night, Mr Aulain," she said, trying to speak calmly; "I do not wish to—I hope I never may—see you again."

"No doubt," was the sneering response. "Mr Thomas Gerrard, the squatter, is in a very different position from Randolph Aulain, the digger, with a paltry three or four thousand pounds."

Kate set her teeth, and tried hard to choke a sob.

"My father and I thought that you were a gentleman, Mr Aulain. I see now how very much we were mistaken. And as far as Mr Gerrard is concerned, he will know how to

deal with you. I will ask my father to write to him to-morrow."

"Why not expedite your proposed visit to him, and tell him personally?" said Aulain with a mocking laugh.

Kate made no answer, but walked swiftly away. Five minutes later, Aulain, without going to the house to say good-bye to Douglas Fraser, descended the rocky path to the main camp.

At daylight next morning, to the wonder of Sam Young and his mates, he was missing. He had risen at dawn, caught and saddled his horses, and gone off without a word of farewell.

CHAPTER XXVII

"HANSEN'S RUSH" was one of the richest, noisiest, and the "rowdiest" of all the many newly-discovered fields, and contained more of the elements of villainy amongst its six hundred inhabitants than any other rush in the Australian Colonies. Perhaps about two-thirds of the men were genuine diggers, the rest were loafers, card-sharpers, horse and cattle thieves, sly grog - sellers, and men "wanted" by the police for various offences, from murder down to simple robbery with violence. So far, however, the arm of the law had not yet manifested its power at "Hansen's," although at first when the field was discovered by the prospector after whom it was named, a solitary white trooper and one native tracker had reached there, expecting to be reinforced. But one day he and the aboriginal rode out of camp to visit a party of diggers, who were working at the head of the creek, and never returned.

Months afterwards, the body of the white man was found lying near a heap of huge

boulders, and it was concluded that either the unfortunate trooper had been thrown from his horse and killed, or that he had been murdered by his black subordinate, for the latter was never seen again at the camp, and most of the diggers asserted that he had deserted to the coastal blacks, where he would be safe from capture. When the body was discovered a careful search was made for some gold which had been entrusted to the policeman, but it could not be found; and this confirmed the theory of the tracker being the murderer.

Then, nearly three months after, "Moses," as the black tracker was named, walked into Somerset carrying his carbine and revolver, and told another story, which was accepted by the authorities as true. The party of miners whom he and the trooper visited, had complained of their tent having been entered when they were absent at their claim, and some hundreds of ounces of gold stolen. This was some weeks previously, and heavy rain, since then, had obliterated all traces of the robbers' tracks. The diggers, said Moses, then gave the trooper a bag of small nuggets containing about fifty ounces, and asked him to take it to Hansen's to await the monthly gold escort.

That night he and Moses camped near the

boulders, and at daylight the latter went after the horses, leaving the poor trooper asleep. Half an hour later, he heard the sound of a shot, and saw three mounted men galloping towards him. They halted when they saw him, and then all three fired at him, but missed. Then they tried to head him off—he was on foot—but he was too fleet, and after an hour's pursuit he gained some wild country in the ranges, where he was, he thought, safe. Feeling hungry as the morning went on, he penetrated a thick scrub in the hope of finding a scrub turkey's nest. He did find one, and whilst engaged in eating the eggs, was dealt a sudden blow from behind with a waddy, and when he became conscious, found he had been captured by a wandering tribe of mountain blacks. They did not treat him harshly, but kept a strict watch on him for two months. One wild night, however, securing his carbine and revolver, he managed to escape, and finally reached Somerset.

"Hansen's," in addition to the several bark-roofed drinking shanties of bad reputation, also possessed a combined public house and general store, kept by a respectable old digger named Vale, who was doing a very thriving business, the "Roan Pack-Horse Hotel" being much favoured by the better class of men on

the field. The loafers, rowdies, and such gentry did not like Vale, who had a way of throwing a man out if he became objectionably drunk and unduly offensive.

One afternoon, about five, three men entered the "hotel" part of Vale's establishment, and entered what was termed "the parlour." They were very good customers of Vale's, although he did not much care about them, being somewhat suspicious as to their character and antecedents. The three men were Forrester, the Jew Barney Green, and Cheyne.

The former had grown a thick beard, and looked what he professed to be—a digger pure and simple; and Green and Cheyne also had discarded the use of the razor, and in their rough miners' garb—flannel shirts, mole-skin pants, and slouch felt hats—there was nothing to distinguish them from the ordinary run of diggers at Hansen's Rush. They had, Vale knew, a supposedly paying claim, but worked it in a very perfunctory manner, and employed two "wages men" to do most of the pick and shovel work. Their esteemed American *confrère* was not with them this afternoon—one of them always remained about their claim and tent on some excuse, for it contained many little articles which, had they been discovered by the respectable diggers at

Hansen's, would have led to their taking a very hurried departure from the field.

"What's it to be?" said Vale, coming to the door of the room.

"Oh, a bottle of Kinahan," said Forrester, tossing the price of it—a sovereign—upon the table. "Got any salt beef to spare?"

"Not a bite. Wish I had. But that mob of cattle can't be far off now. They were camped at the Green Swamp two nights ago. There's a hundred head—all fine, prime young cattle, I hear."

"Are you buying the lot?"

"Every hoof—at ten pound a head. Plenty of fresh beef then—at two bob a pound. No charge for hoofs, horns, and the end of the tail," and with this pleasantries, the landlord of the "Roan Pack-Horse" withdrew, to bring the whisky.

A step sounded outside, and Randolph Aulain entered and nodded to the three men. He had been at Hansen's for some months, and had one of the richest "pocket" claims on the field, but most of the gold it produced went in gambling. He had made the acquaintance of Forrester and his gang, and in a way had become intimate with them, although he was pretty certain of their character. But he did not care.

"Have a drink, Aulain?" said Barney Green.

Aulain nodded, and sat down, and then a pack of cards was produced, and the four men began to play—Aulain as recklessly as usual, and drinking frequently, as was now habitual with him.

Night had fallen, and the diggers' camp fires were everywhere blazing among tents and humpies, as the ex-officer and his villainous acquaintances still sat at their cards, too intent upon the game to think of supper. Vale's black boy, however, brought them in some tea, damper, and a tin of preserved meat, and they made a hurried meal. Just as they had begun to play afresh, they heard a horseman draw up outside, and a voice say "Good-evening, boss," to Vale.

All four men knew that voice, and Aulain's dark face set, as turning down his cards, he held up his hand for silence.

"I'm Gerrard from Ocho Rios," went on the voice as the rider dismounted, and, giving his horse to the black boy, followed Vale into the combined bar and store. "I've camped the cattle five miles from here, and pushed on to let you know. Can you take delivery to-morrow morning pretty early, as I want to get down to the coast again as soon as I can?"

"You bet!" said Vale with a laugh; "I'm all ready, and so is the money—not in cash, but in nuggets at four pounds the ounce. Is that right?"

"Quite," was the answer, and then the four listeners heard Vale drawing the cork of a bottle of beer—a rare commodity at Hansen's Rush. "Come round here, Mr Gerrard, and sit down. There's another room, but just now there are four chaps gaffing there, and so if you don't mind we'll sit here, and talk until my nigger gets you some supper." Then they began to talk about the cattle, Vale frankly telling Gerrard that if he had asked another five pounds per head, he would have paid it, as the diggers had had no fresh meat for nearly five months.

"Well, I've been very lucky," said Gerrard, and Forrester saw Aulain's teeth set, and wondered. "We—three black boys and myself—started out from the station with a hundred and ten head, and have not lost a single beast—no niggers, no alligators, no poison bush, nothing of any kind to worry us for the whole two hundred miles."

"I'll give him something to worry over before long," said Green viciously to Forrester.

"And so shall I," said Aulain in a savage whisper.

"Do you know him?" asked Forrester eagerly.

Aulain replied with a curt nod, and then again held up his hand for silence.

"Curse you, keep quiet; I want to hear what he is saying."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, Mr Gerrard," went on Vale. "I've heard a lot about you, and was sorry to hear of your loss in the big fire. I wish you luck."

"Thank you, Mr Vale. And I'm glad to meet you, and sell you my cattle. Every one that I have heard speak of you says that you will never try to 'skin' a digger over the price of his liquor and 'tucker.'"

Vale was pleased. For a bush publican and store-keeper he had an unusual reputation for honesty—and well deserved it, for all his roughness and lurid language when aroused to wrath. He asked Gerrard to stay for the night.

"No, I cannot. I must get back to the cattle to-night, and do my watch. But I think I shall spell here at Hansen's for a day or two, have a look at the field, and see if I can buy a share in one of the claims. As I'm getting my money out of the diggings I ought to put something back, even if I strike a rank duffer."

"Ah, you're one of the right sort of men, Mr Gerrard. I daresay I can put you on to

something that won't displease you in the end. But I'm sorry you can't camp here to-night."

"No, I must not. It would not be fair to my men to leave them with a mob of cattle out in the open all night in such thunder-stormy weather. If they broke away they would clear off into the ranges."

Then he added that whilst two of his black stockmen were returning to Ocho Rios after they had had a spell at "Hansen's," he was striking across country to the coast—seventy miles distant—to the mouth of the Coen River.

"You see, Mr Vale, my luck is coming in, 'hand over fist,' as the sailors say. I'm going to be married at Ocho Rios next month by the Gold Commissioner, and there is a pearly lugger bringing me a lot of stores round from Somerset, and I have arranged to meet her at the Coen on the 22nd, and sail round in her. I'm taking one black boy with me, who will take my horse back with him to the station, and I'll get the benefit of a short sea-trip of a few days, or perhaps a week."

Vale opened another bottle of beer—more valued at Hansen's than even whisky at a sovereign a bottle.

"Here's to your very good fortune and happiness, Mr Gerrard! Will you mind my mentioning it to the boys here to-night? You

see, I arranged to give a sort of a shivoo as soon as the cattle got here, and I had killed and dressed a couple of beasts."

Gerrard laughed. "I don't mind. And I'll come to the shivoo myself, and eat some of my own beef. Now, I must be getting back to the cattle."

Aulain and the other three men waited until they heard his horse brought. And then the dark-faced ex-inspector turned to Forreste.

"Come outside. I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE news that a small mob of cattle had been bought by Vale, and were to arrive on the following day, caused great satisfaction to the diggers, and that night the "Roan Pack-Horse" was crowded with diggers, who had not for many months tasted meat of any kind, except now and then a scrub wallaby. Game of any kind was scarce, and hard to shoot, and the diggers, although they cheerfully paid adventurous packers three shillings for a small tin of sardines, and five for a tin of American salmon, wanted beef of some kind—even if it were that of a worn-out working bullock—if such a treasure could have been found. Vale, for business and other purposes, had carefully avoided telling any one until the last moment that he had sent a letter to Gerrard, offering him ten pounds per head for one or two hundred young cattle, delivered to him in fair condition. A "cute" man of business, he had the idea of forming the nucleus of a herd with which to stock some adjacent country to "Hansen's Rush," and being also in his rough

way a sentimentalist, he meant to give the diggers a surprise—for a satisfactory *quid pro quo*. He would sell them fresh beef at two shillings a pound, when they were willing to pay double, instead of eating “tinned dog,” as they termed the New Zealand and American canned beef and mutton they bought from the packers at exorbitant prices, and often cast aside with disgust and much vivid language.

At nine o'clock on the following morning, Gerrard and his three black stockmen appeared, driving before them the mob of young cattle—steers, young heifers, and a few bulls; and the diggers gave him an uproarious welcome, for work on the claims had been stopped for that day at least, and they had been waiting for him.

“Good morning, boys,” cried Gerrard, as the mob of cattle was rounded up by his black stockmen, and he, swinging his right foot up out of the stirrup, sat sideways on his saddle. “Just show me those you want for killing, Vale, and I’ll cut them out for you right away. Then I’ll turn the rest over to you to tail.¹ I’ve had enough of ’em, and want a drink.”

“Here you are, Mr Gerrard,” cried a big, hairy-faced digger, who was holding a bottle of beer in one hand, and a tin pannikin in the

¹ “Tail”—a drover or stockman who is set to keep a mob of cattle from straying “tails” them—*i.e.*, follows at their tails.

other ; "a bottle of genuine Tennant's India Ale, acceptable to the most tender stomach, and recommended by the faculty for nuns, nurses, bullock drivers, and other delicate persons."

The crowd laughed, and then Gerrard, after satisfying his thirst, "cut out" (separated from the rest of the mob) three fat steers indicated by Vale ; they were at once taken to the killing yard, and the remainder of the animals driven down to the creek to drink, and Gerrard's responsibility ceased.

Amongst those who watched the arrival of the cattle were Aulain and Forreste. They were on the outskirts of the crowd, leaning against the rough "chock and dog leg" fence which served to enclose an acre or so of ground used as a horse-paddock by the diggers. Early in the day as it was, Aulain's sallow face was flushed from drinking. He and Forreste had come to an understanding the previous night. The gentlemanly "Captain" did not take long to discover the cause of Aulain's hatred of Gerrard, and he inflamed it still further by telling him a well-connected series of lies about his frequently having seen Kate Fraser clasped in Gerrard's arms on the deck of the *Gambier*, when they imagined that they were unobserved, and Aulain, who was now hardly sane, believed him implicitly.

"Let me deal with him first," he had said; "you can have your turn after I have finished with him."

"You don't mean to kill him?" asked Forrester; "if you do, I'm out of it. I have a score to settle with him, but not in that way."

"Settle it in any way you like," said Aulain savagely, "but don't interfere with me. I'm not going to kill him, but I am going to make him suffer for his treachery to me. But," and he turned to Forrester with a sneer, "you seem very diffident in the matter of killing any one just now. Perhaps you and your friends acted rather impulsively in the matter of Trooper Angus Irving."

"What do you mean?" cried Forrester hoarsely, and his face blanched with mingled rage and terror.

"I have not been five years in the Native Police without gaining some experience. And when you and your friends galloped after the black tracker, one of your number lost his moleskin saddle-cloth, did he not?"

Forrester made no answer, though his lips moved.

"I found that saddle-cloth two months ago, and recognised it as belonging to your mate Cheyne, for he once lent it to me. It was a great mistake of his to gallop over rough

country with loose girths—especially upon such an occasion as that. Fifty ounces of gold was not worth it.”

Forreste, a coward at heart, collapsed. “We could not help it. We were trying to unbuckle his valise from his saddle when he awoke, and——

“And—I understand. So please say no more of what followed. It does not concern me, and you need not look so ghastly white.”

Then he walked away to his tent, for he did not wish to be seen by Gerrard—at that time.

But a few hours later the latter learnt quite accidentally from Vale that his one-time friend was at Hansen’s, and had been one of the card-playing party of the previous night. Vale was speaking of the great yields from some of the claims on the field, and mentioned that “Aulain, who had been in the Nigger Police,” had a pretty rich one. Gerrard was surprised to hear of his being at Hansen’s, for he and the Frasers thought he had gone to the new rush at Cape Grenville on the east coast. Of her quarrel with him Kate had told Gerrard but little, but her father had given him the story in detail, and it had angered him greatly.

“Would you care to go over to his claim, and have a yarn with him?” said Vale; “it’s

only about a mile away. I think he wants to sell out."

"No, I don't want to see him. I know him very well, and he was once a great friend of mine, but he is not now, and I don't think it would be advisable for us to meet. He nurses an imaginary grievance against me."

Vale nodded. "He's a queer fellow, and I am sure he's not quite right in the upper story. Sometimes he won't speak to a soul for a week at a time; then he has a drinking bout, and goes off his head entirely. I feel sorry for him, for it is a pity to see a gentleman come down so low, and associate with spielers and card-sharpers. The men he was playing with last night are a shady lot—a man called Forreste, and his mates Cheyne and Capel——"

"Ha!" cried Gerrard, "so that gang is here? I know a good deal about *them*," and he told Vale of what had occurred on board the *Gambier* when Fraser had thrown Capel across the deck.

"I thought they were a fishy crowd, and there are lots of men here who believe they are gold-stealers, but so far they have been too clever and have escaped detection."

"Well, I can tell you that Capel, otherwise Barney Green, is one of the most notorious

gold thieves in Australia, and served a sentence in New South Wales."

"Can I make that known?"

"Certainly. It should be known. You can call upon me to repeat what I have told you to the whole camp."

"Very well, but not to-day. They'll be sure to be here to-night at the shivoo, and as some of the boys are certain to be pretty groggy they might half-kill the whole gang. But I'll go for them in the morning, if you'll back me up."

"Of course I will. But I don't think they will show up to-night, if they know I am here."

In this surmise Gerrard was correct, for Forrester and his companions kept away, being particularly anxious not to come into personal contact with him, and in pursuance of a plan of their own. After the cattle had been killed, they sent a neighbouring digger to buy some beef, and remained at their claim for the rest of the day. Forrester, however, went to several of the other claims, and told the owners that he and his mates thought of clearing out in a day or so, and would sell their claim cheap.

In an hour or two he came back, and found Cheyne outside the tent, repairing their

saddles. Green and Pinkerton were busy at the claim, cradling the last of the wash-dirt taken out.

"What luck?" asked Cheyne.

"Better than I expected. Old Sandy MacParland and his party are coming here to-morrow morning, and are going to give the claim a day's trial. If they like it, they will buy us out for one hundred pounds."

"Pity we haven't got time to salt it,¹ and get a bigger price."

"MacParland is too old a hand to be got at that way," replied the captain, as he walked on to the claim to tell Green and Pinkerton his news.

"We can get away to-morrow evening before sunset," he said, after he had told them the result of his negotiations with MacParland. "Cheyne says we can camp at Leichhardt Ponds that night, push on early in the morning, and wait for our man at Rocky Waterholes, where he is sure to camp for the night."

"He'll want a good rest if Aulain does him up to-night," said Capel with an evil grin.

¹ "Salting" a gold mine is a common practice of dishonest miners not entirely unknown even to magnates of the Stock Exchange—as the records of the London Law Courts have shown for many years past.

CHAPTER XXIX

NEARLY a hundred noisy but contented diggers filled Vale's hotel and store, all talking at once ; and outside in the yard, seated on boxes, barrels, etc., were as many more, equally as well satisfied as those within. The impromptu and "free feed" of freshly-killed beef had been a great success, and now at seven o'clock, what Vale called "the harmony" began—to wit, music from a battered cornet, an asthmatic accordion, and a weird violin. There were, however, plenty of good singing voices in the company, and presently a big, fat-faced American negro, with a rich fruity voice, struck up a well-known mining song, "The Windlasses," and the diggers thundered out the chorus :

"For I love the sound of the windlasses,
And the cry, 'Look-out, below.'"

At its conclusion there was much applause, and then the negro, who was an ex-sailor, was pressed, very literally, for another song. One digger gripped him around the waist, and another seized his woolly poll and shook him.

"Sing, you beggar, sing! Give us the 'Arctic Fleet.'"

"Don' you be so familiar, sah! You common digger pusson! How dah you take liberties with a gentleman!" and the negro laughed good-naturedly as he was forced on his feet again. "And don' se singist get some refreshment fust?"

It was at once supplied, and then "Black Pete's" rich tones sounded out in their full strength as he began the whaleman's ditty:

"Oh, its advertised in Noo York town,
Likewise in Alban-ee,
For five hunder and fifty Yankee boys,
To join de whaling fleet.
Singing, blow ye windy mornin's,
And blow ye winds, heigho,
Clear away de marnin' dews,
To de Arctic we mus' go,
To de Arctic we mus' go."

The song was a lengthy one, and when it was finished, there was a pause; then some digger called out through the cloud of tobacco smoke that filled the room:

"Won't you give us a song, Mr Gerrard?"

Gerrard, who was talking to Vale, and some other men, turned and shook his head smilingly, when suddenly there was a slight commotion near the open door, and Randolph Aulain

pushed through the crowd into the centre of the room. He was booted and spurred, and carried a short, heavy whip of plaited greenhide.

"I should like to have a few words with you, Mr Gerrard, before you sing."

In an instant there was a dead silence—the diggers saw that Aulain meant mischief, for his usually sallow features were now white with ill-concealed fury. Gerrard kept his seat, but leant back a little so as to look Aulain full in the face.

"I am not going to sing," he said quietly. "If you have anything to say to me, say it."

"This filthy den is somewhat too crowded for a private discussion—unless you wish to let every one here know what you are. Come outside."

"You want me to fight you, Aulain, do you?" The steady, unmoved tone of his voice sounded clearly through the crowded room.

"Yes, you treacherous hound, I do. I'll *make* you fight."

"You shall not. I do not fight with lunatics—and you speak and act like one. Come here to-morrow morning—or I will come to you if you wish."

Vale put his hand on Aulain's arm, with rough good-humour. "Get back to your tent, my lad, or sit down and keep quiet. This

is my house. You can see Mr Gerrard in the morning. I'll engage he won't run away."

Aulain thrust him aside with savage determination, and again faced Gerrard. "Are you coming outside?" he asked hoarsely.

"No, I am not. But don't try my patience too long, Aulain."

"Will you come or not?" he almost shouted, and he drew back a step, amidst a hot, expectant silence.

"No, you are not in a condition to speak to any one, let alone fighting," was the contemptuous answer.

"Then take that, you wretched cur!" and he swung his heavy whip across Gerrard's face, cutting the flesh open from temple to chin, and sending him down upon the earth floor.

In an instant the maddened man was seized by Vale and another man, and borne to the ground. Then amidst oaths and curses, he was dragged outside, struggling like a demon, and carried to his horse, which was tied up to the fence. He was hoisted up into the saddle, and at once tried to take his pistol from its pouch, but the diggers took it away, and then seized his Winchester carbine.

"Here, take your reins, you murderous dog!" cried Vale, putting them into his hands.

"Stand back, boys, and we'll start him off to blazes."

"He has a Derringer inside his shirt," cried one of the men, "I've seen it."

"Let him keep it," and Vale raised the whip which he had torn from Aulain's hand, and gave the horse a stinging cut on the flank, and with a snort of pain and terror the animal leapt forward into the darkness.

Never again was Randolph Aulain seen alive, but weeks afterwards his horse wandered back to Hansen's Rush, and began to graze outside his master's tent. And all that was left of Aulain was found long after in a gully in the ranges, with a rusted Derringer pistol lying beside some bleaching bones.

Gerrard had a great send-off when he left Hansen's for the coast. The terrible cut on his face had been sewn up by a digger known as "Pat O'Shea," who, ten years before, had had on his brass door-plate in Merrion Square, Dublin, the inscription, "Mr Vernon O'Shea, M.R.C.S."

"Take care of yourself, boss," cried Vale, as Gerrard swung himself up into the saddle, and made a grimace intended for a smile as he waved his hand to the assembled diggers, and trotted off, followed by his black boy, a short,

wiry-framed aboriginal from the Burdekin River country, who was much attached to his master, and eyed his bound-up face with much concern. He, like Gerrard, carried a revolver at his saddle-bow, and a Snider carbine in a becket—Native Police fashion. Gerrard, in addition to his revolver, had a 44° Winchester carbine slung across his shoulder.

"Well, Tommy, here we are off home again. How do you feel? Drunk last night?"

"Yes, boss. Last night and night before, too. Mine had it fine time longa Hansen's."

Gerrard laughed, and began to fill his pipe, though smoking just then gave him as much pain as pleasure. Then he and Tommy rode on in silence for many hours, until they came to where the beaten track ended at a lagoon, known as Leichhardt Ponds. Here they noticed that a party had been camped the previous night, and had evidently been shooting and eating duck, for the ground was strewn with feathers.

From Leichhardt Ponds there was not even a blazed tree line, but both he and the black boy kept steadily on, their bushmen's knowledge guiding them in a bee line for the particular part of the coast they wished to reach.

As they rode along, Tommy's eyes scanned the ground, which was strewn with a thick carpet of dead leaves and bark from the forest gum trees.

"Four fellow men been come along here yesterday, boss," he said, as he pulled up and pointed downward.

Gerrard bent over in his saddle, and looked at the tracks indicated by Tommy.

"Some fellow stray horse perhaps, Tommy?"

The black boy grunted a disapproval of the suggestion. No horses would stray so far from Hansen's, where there was good grass country, into "stunted ironbark" country where there was none. And presently to prove his contention, he pulled up and pointed to a small white object on the ground.

"Look, boss. Some fellow been light pipe and throw away match."

In an instant Gerrard's suspicions were aroused. What could a party of four men be doing so far away from Hansen's—and making towards the coast? Vale had told him that there were scores of notoriously bad characters on the field, and that it was known that he (Vale) was paying him for the cattle in gold, and had advised him to keep a sharp look-out for any strangers.

For another two hours he and the black boy saw the tracks still going in the same direction, till open country was reached—a wide plain covered with clay pans. Here the tracks turned off sharply to the right, and Gerrard pulled up.

“Which way Frenchman’s Cap, Tommy?”

Tommy pointed to the right.

Frenchman’s Cap was a small mining camp, sixty miles distant, and Gerrard was satisfied that the four horsemen were diggers, bound for that spot, and Tommy agreed with him.

But he was woefully mistaken in his conclusions.

Cheyne was one of the cleverest bushmen in Australia, and when Forrester and his party reached this spot, they too had stopped, at Cheyne’s bidding.

“Gerrard has a nigger with him who most likely will see our tracks. If we turn off here, and cross the clay pans, he will think we are going to Frenchman’s Cap. It will mean us making a half circle of sixteen miles, but we will get to Rocky Waterholes a long way ahead of him.”

“How do you know he’ll camp there?” asked Forrester.

“He’s sure too, even if only for an hour

or two to spell his horses, and we'll get him as easy as falling off a log."

Forreste moved uneasily in his saddle. He knew what "get him" meant. Barney Green turned on him, and savagely asked if he was "funking" again.

"No," was the sullen reply, "I'm not. I've given my promise, and I'll keep it. But you must remember that the policeman's tracker got away from us, and Gerrard's nigger may do the same."

"I'll see to that," said Pinkerton. "If there is one thing that I can't miss when I shoot, it's a nigger. If I had been with you that day, I guess that that tracker wouldn't have got away."

The plan they had arranged was a very simple one. The Rocky Waterholes were deep pools situated in the centre of a cluster of wildly confused and lofty granite boulders and pillars, covered with vines and creepers and broken up by narrow gullies. Cheyne knew the place, and knew almost to a certainty the particular spot at which Gerrard would camp, either for a few hours or for the night. It was in an open grassy space, almost surrounded by giant boulders. It was their intention, after disposing of Gerrard and

the black boy, and securing the gold, to strike across country for Somerset, and there await a steamer bound for either London or Hongkong. At that place, where the steamers only remained for an hour or two, they would attract no more than the casual notice taken of lucky diggers; at Townsville or Port Denison they might be recognised. Already they had nearly a thousand ounces of gold between them—some little of it honestly earned from their own claim at Hansen's, but most of it gained by robbery; and with the two thousand pounds' worth that they knew were in Gerrard's possession, they calculated that they might leave the hardships of mining life, and enjoy themselves for a considerable time in England or America—without, however, the society of "Snaky" Swires, who had left them at Cooktown, fearful of being arrested in connection with the robbery on the *Gambier*.

CHAPTER XXX

"WHAT a lovely spot!" thought Gerrard, as he caught sight of the Rocky Waterholes, whose calm, placid surfaces were gleaming like burnished silver under the rays of the sinking sun.

It was indeed a beautiful scene, for the five pools were surrounded by noble Leichhardt and wattle trees, the latter all in the full glory of their golden flowers, the sweet perfume of which scented the air for miles around. Close in to the bank of the largest pool were a number of teal feeding on the green weed, and chasing each other over the shining water. As they caught sight of the intruders, they rose with a whirl and disappeared, followed a few seconds later by a pair of snow-white cranes, which, however, merely flew noiselessly upward, and settled on the branches of a Leichhardt.

The day had been intensely hot, and now, as the sun sank, there was presage of a thunderstorm, and Gerrard and Tommy quickly unsaddled, hobbled, and turned out

the horses to feed upon the thick buffalo grass that grew in profusion around the bases of the vine-clad rocks which overlooked the pools. Then they hurriedly collected some dead wood for their camp fire, and threw it, together with their saddles, blankets, etc., under an overhanging ledge which would afford them complete shelter from the coming downpour.

A fire was soon lit, and whilst Tommy attended to making the tea, his master unrolled his own blanket and spread it out; then, from mere force of habit, he took his revolver from his saddle and strapped it to his belt, placed his Winchester and Tommy's Snider against the side of the rock, where they would be within easy reach, and then told the black boy that he was going to have a bathe before supper.

"No, no, boss!" cried Tommy, energetically, "baal you bogey longa that waterhole. Plenty fellow blue water snake sit down there—plenty. One bite you little bit, you go bung quick. Plenty fellow myall go bung longa baigan."¹

Gerrard could not repress a shudder. He

¹ "Do not bathe in that waterhole. Many blue water-snakes live in it. If one bit you, even a little, you would die quickly. Many wild blacks have been killed by the *baigan*."

had often seen the dreaded "baigan"—a bright blue snake which frequented waterholes and lagoons, and whose venom equalled that of the deadly fer-de-lance of Martinique and St Vincent. Years before he had seen a cattle dog swimming in a lagoon attacked by a "baigan," which bit it on the lip, and, although a stockman, as soon as the animal was out of the water, cut out a circular piece of the lip, it died in a few minutes.

"Very well, Tommy. I'll wait till after supper and have a bogey in the rain."

As he spoke, the low rumble of thunder sounded, and deepened and deepened until it culminated in a mighty clap that seemed to shake the foundations of the earth, then followed peal after peal, and soon the rain descended in torrents, beating the waters of the pools into froth, and making a noise as of surf surging upon a pebbly beach.

For twenty minutes the downpour held; then it ceased suddenly, and, like magic, a few stars appeared. The fire was now blazing merrily in the cave. Tommy had made the two quart pots of tea, and Gerrard was taking the beef and damper out of his saddle-bag when the black boy started.

"What is it, Tommy?"

"Horse neigh!"

Gerrard listened. The boy was right, for he, too, heard a second neigh, and their own horses, which they could see standing quietly under a big Leichhardt tree, undisturbed by the storm, pricked up their ears and raised their heads.

"Quick, take your rifle, Tommy!" and Gerrard seized his own, then taking up the two quart pots of tea, he threw the contents over the fire, and partly extinguished it—not a moment too soon, for almost at the same moment a volley rang out, and he knew he was hit; and Tommy also cried out that he was shot in the face. Seizing him by the hand, Gerrard dragged him outside, stooping low, and bullet after bullet struck the wall of the cave. As he and the black boy threw themselves flat on the ground a few yards away, they both saw the flashes of rifles less than a hundred yards distant, and knew by the sound of and the rapidity of the firing that their unseen foes were using Winchesters.

"Keep still, Tommy, don't fire. Wait, wait!" said Gerrard in an excited whisper. "Let them go on firing into the cave. Can you make out where they are?"

Pressing his hand to his cheek, which had been cut open by a bullet, the black boy watched the flashes.

"Yes, boss, I see him—four fellow altogether. You look longa top flat rock, they all lie down close together."

But keen as was his sight, Gerrard could see nothing but the flat moss and vine-covered summit of a huge granite boulder, from which the flashes came. Presently a bullet struck a piece of wood on the still smouldering fire, and scattered the glowing coals, then the firing ceased, and they heard voices.

"Keep quiet, Tommy. Don't move, for God's sake, or they'll see us. They are reloading. They think they have killed us. Is your Snider all right?"

"Yes, boss," was the whispered and eager reply, "rible and rewolber too."

"Are you much hurt, Tommy?"

"Only longa face, boss."

"And I'm hit too, Tommy, but not much hurt." A bullet had ploughed through the lower part of his thigh, and as he spoke he tore two strips from his handkerchief, and bidding Tommy watch their hidden foes, cut open his moleskin pants, and hurriedly plugged the holes. As he was doing this, the firing again began, and they could hear the bullets spattering against the granite rock, or striking the saddles. After about thirty shots had been fired it again ceased.

"Be ready, Tommy," whispered Gerrard ;
"they'll be here presently. Don't fire till they
are quite close, then drop rifle and take pistol."

"All right, boss. Look, look! You see
one fellow now stand up—there 'nother, 'nother
—four fellow."

The increasing starlight just enabled Gerrard
to catch a brief glimpse of four figures moving
about on the top of the boulder, then they
disappeared, and he clutched his Winchester.

Five anxious minutes passed, and then one
by one the four forms appeared coming round
from the other side of the boulder. For a
few moments they halted, then came boldly
out of the shadows into the starlight, and then
a deadly rage leapt into Gerrard's heart as
he recognised two of them. First the man
whom Kate's father had handled so roughly
on board the *Gambier*, and then the tall,
imposing figure of Forreste.

"Can you see their horses anywhere?" said
the man who was in advance of his three
companions, and they again stopped and looked
about them.

"Oh, they are all right," said a second
voice ; "we'll find 'em easy enough in the
morning. They're both hobbled, and won't
be far away. Now come on, Pinky, and show
us your nigger with the top of his head off.

You're a great gasser, I know. Strike a match, Barney, and I'll get a bit of dry ti-tree bark to give us a light."

Gerrard pressed Tommy's arm. "Wait, Tommy, wait. Let them get a light. All the better for us. Listen!"

"I suppose they are properly done for, Cheyne?" said Forreste, who had a revolver in his hand.

"Oh, put your flaming pistol back into its pouch, you funky owl," snarled Barney Green, "they both dropped at the first time, as I told you. Gerrard fell on to the fire, and you'll find him cooking there, and that both of 'em are as full of holes as a cullender. We've wasted a hundred cartridges for nothing, but I daresay we'll get some more. He had a forty-four Winchester, and the nigger a Snider."

A match was struck, and the two motionless watchers saw Cheyne go to a ti-tree, which grew on the edge of the large pool, tear off the outer thin and wet bark, and then make a torch of the dry part, which lit easily. Pinkerton waved it to and fro for a few moments, and then held it up. It burst into flame.

"Now, Tommy, quick! Take the big man," and as Gerrard spoke he covered Green.

The two rifles rang out, and Forreste and

the Jew fell. Pinkerton dropped the torch and tried to draw his revolver, but a second shot from Gerrard broke his leg, and he too dropped. Cheyne sprang off towards the pool, leapt in, and swam across to where their horses were hidden. Tommy, with all the lust of slaughter upon him, tomahawk in hand, ran round the pool to intercept him on the other side.

"Let him go, Tommy, let him go!" shouted Gerrard, who was now feeling faint from loss of blood. "Come back, come back!" and as he spoke, Pinkerton, who could see him, began firing at him.

The black boy obeyed just as Gerrard sank back upon the ground. The still blazing torch, however, revealed his prone figure to the American, who, rising upon one knee, reloaded his revolver. Then Tommy leapt at him, raised his tomahawk, and clove his head in twain.

"Did he hit you, boss?" he cried, as, still holding the ensanguined weapon in his hand, he darted to his master.

"No, Tommy, I'm all right, but bingie mine feel sick.¹ Get water for me, Tommy."

The black boy ran down to the waterhole, filled his cabbage-tree hat with water, and Gerrard drank.

"Go and see if those two men are dead,

¹ "I feel faint."

Tommy. If they are not, take their pistols away. Then make a big fire, and I will come and look at them."

"All right, boss, but by and by."

He raised and assisted Gerrard into the cave, laid him down upon his blanket, and placed his head upon one of the bullet-riddled saddles, re-lit the extinguished fire, took off his shirt, tore off the back, and bandaged his master's thigh with it.

"You like smoke now, boss?"

"Yes, fill my pipe before you go."

Five minutes later Tommy returned.

"All three fellow dead," he observed placidly, as he stooped down to the fire and lit his own pipe with a burning coal. "Big man me shoot got him bullet through chest; little man with black beard and nose like cockatoo you shoot, got him bullet through chest too, close up longa troat."

Then he asked if he might go after the two horses, which, hobbled as they were, had gone off at the first sound of the firing, and were perhaps many miles away.

"All right, Tommy. We must not let them get too far away."

The black boy grunted an assent, made the fire blaze up, and taking up his own and Gerrard's bridles, disappeared.

In less than half an hour he returned, riding one horse and leading the other, and found that Gerrard had risen and was looking at the bodies of the three men, which lay stark and stiff under the now bright starlight. Tommy's face wore an expression of supreme satisfaction as he jumped off his horse.

"Other fellow man bung¹ too," he said in a complacent tone.

"Did you shoot him?" cried Gerrard, aghast at more bloodshed.

"Baal me shoot him, boss. I find him longa place where all four fellow been camp in little gully. He been try to put saddle on horse, but fall down and die—*boigan* been bite him I think it, when he swim across waterhole."

"Come and show me," said Gerrard, and, suffering as he was, he mounted his horse, and followed Tommy. In a few minutes they came to the place where Forreste and his gang had hidden their horses, all of which were tethered.

Lying doubled up on the ground beside a saddle, was the body of Cheyne. He had succeeded in putting the bridle on his horse, and then had evidently fallen ere he could place the saddle on the animal.

¹ *Bung*—dead.

Gerrard struck a match, and held it to the dead man's face ; it was purple, and hideous to look upon.

"Boigan," said Tommy placidly, as he re-lit his pipe.

CHAPTER XXXI

THREE days passed before Gerrard and the black boy were able to leave the Rocky Waterholes. The bodies of their treacherous assailants they interred in the soft, sandy soil at the foot of one of the granite pillars, and then Gerrard took their valises containing their gold, together with their arms and saddle pouches, and rolled them in a blanket, which he strapped on one of the gang's horses, which was to serve as a pack. He intended to hand everything over to the Gold Commissioner, whom he expected to see at Ochos Rios in a few weeks, and who having judicial powers, would, he expected, hold the official inquiry into the deaths of the men at the station itself.

Tommy made but little of his wound, and only grinned when Gerrard said he was lucky not to have had his jaw smashed by the bullet. He doctored it in the usual aboriginal manner : first powdering it with wood ashes, and then plastering the whole side of his face with wattle gum.

"My word, Tommy," observed his master

gravely, "you got him handsome fellow face now—all the same as me. Plenty fellow lubra want catch you now for benjamin."¹

Gerrard's own wound, although painful, did not prevent him from either walking or riding. The soft wattle gum was a splendid styptic, and two whole days and nights of complete rest did much to accelerate his recovery; and game being plentiful at and about the waterholes, he and Tommy made themselves as contented as possible, for there was still a clear week before the pearling lugger was due at the mouth of the Coen. He had changed his mind about letting Tommy go back alone along the beach, and decided to take him with him in the vessel. The boy's bravery had impressed him greatly, and although he knew his resourcefulness and abilities as a bushman, he thought it would not be fair—for the sake of two horses—to let him run the risk of being cut off by the coastal blacks, while on his way to the station. As for the horses, they would find their way home safely in all likelihood, unless they came across poison bush. The blacks did not often succeed in spearing loose horses, the slower-moving cattle being their favoured victims.

¹ "Plenty of women will want to get you now for a husband."

They left the Rocky Waterholes as the strength of the afternoon sun began to wane, and headed due west. As they rode round the side of the largest pool, the three horses of the dead men, which were camped under the shade of the Leichhardt trees, brushing the flies off each other's noses with their long tails, raised their heads inquiringly as if to say. "Are you going to leave us here?" and then sedately trotted after them.

Gerrard turned in his saddle. "Let them follow us, if they like, Tommy. They will be company for "Dutchman" and "Waterboy." I think they'll all turn up at the station by and by."

The unexplored country from the Waterholes to the coast was very pleasant to see in all its diversified beauties: deep water-worn gullies whose sides were clothed with wild fig, wattle, and cabbage palms, opening out into fair forest country, well timbered with huge acacias and a species of white cedar, whose pale blue flowers filled the air with their delicious perfume. Bird life was plentiful, the chattering of long-tailed pheasants and the call of many kinds of parrots resounding everywhere, and filling the tree-clad gullies with melodious, reverberating echoes.

Night came on swiftly, but a night of myriad

stars in a sky of cloudless blue; and then, fifteen miles from the Rocky Waterholes, they came to a wide but shallow creek, whose banks were well grassed, and which offered a tempting resting-place. Here and there were clumps, or rather groves, of graceful pandanus palms, with long pendant leaves, rustling faintly to the cool night breeze.

"We'll camp here till daylight, Tommy. I'm feeling a bit stiff."

As Tommy unsaddled and hobbled out the horses, Gerrard lit a fire, made the two quart pots of tea, and he and the native had their supper. Then, although they had seen no signs of blacks since they had left Hansen's, they took unusual precautions to prevent being surprised, for Gerrard especially was not in a fit condition for much exertion. Letting the horses graze where they listed, they put out the fire, and carried their saddles, blankets, arms, etc., out to a sandbank in the middle of the creek, and made themselves comfortable for the night on the soft, warm sand—too far away from either bank to fear any danger from a shower of spears.

The night wore all too quickly away for Gerrard, for as he lay on his blanket, gazing upward to the star-studded heavens, he forgot the pain of his wounds in his thoughts of Kate,

and he sighed contentedly. In two weeks or so he would be by her side at Ocho Rios.

There had never been what some people call "courtship" between Kate and Gerrard. When she came to the station on her promised visit, her father had come with her. He stayed a few days at Ocho Rios, and then set out on his return to Black Bluff Creek, accompanied by Gerrard, who was going part of the way with him. They had ridden for a mile or two from the station, chatting on various matters, when Gerrard suddenly drew rein.

"Mr Fraser!"

The old man looked up, wondering at the "Mr."

"What is it, Gerrard?"

"I am going to ask your daughter to marry me."

Fraser could not help a smile. "There's no beating about the bush with you, Tom Gerrard." Then he put out his hand, and said with grave kindness: "You are the one man whom I should like to see her marry."

"Thank you," and the younger man's face flushed with pleasure.

Then Fraser, like the tactful man he was, said not a word more on the matter.

"Look here, Gerrard, what is the use of your coming any further with me when you have so much to do? Get back, my son—and I wish you luck. Give Kate my love, and tell her I said so," and then shaking hands with his friend, he struck into a smart canter.

Gerrard rode slowly home. Kate, Jim, and Mary were engaged in making a seine in the cool back verandah. Kate looked up with a smile, surprised and pleased to see him back so soon.

"Will you come with me and shoot some guinea-fowl, Miss Fraser?" Then he hurriedly turned to Jim: "You need not come, Jim. Go on with the seine."

An hour later they returned—without any guinea-fowl. Gerrard was in high spirits. He slapped Jim on the back.

"Let the seine rip, Jim, and get your gun, and we'll try and get some pheasants. We couldn't see a blessed guinea-fowl anywhere; could we, *Kate*?"

"No, *Tom*, we could not; they are horribly scarce to-day, Jim," she replied demurely, as she fled to her room.

After a quiet, restful night, Gerrard and Tommy made an early start, driving the pack-horse in front of them, and followed by the

three spare horses. All that day they travelled slowly, and at sunset reached the mouth of the alligator-haunted Coen, where, to Gerrard's delight, they saw a smart, white-painted lugger lying at anchor. In answer to their loud *coo-e-e*! a boat manned by two Malays, put off, and the master jumped ashore.

"How are you, Mr Gerrard? You see I'm three days sooner than I said, but we got a rattling north-westerly as soon as we rounded Cape York. But what is wrong with your face, Mr Gerrard?" he added sympathetically; "and you're lame too, I see. Niggers, I suppose?"

"No, we haven't even seen a nigger, Captain Lowry. But I'll tell you the whole yarn by and by, after we get aboard. Got any arnica?"

"Plenty, and whips of plaster too. I'll soon fix you up, ship-shape and Bristol fashion."

"Thank you, captain," said Gerrard, as he and Tommy began to unsaddle the horses; "I'll be glad if you will. I don't want to get back to the station until I look a little bit less patchy. And so if you are agreeable, I'll be glad if we go on a bit of a cruise along the coast for about ten days or so."

"I'm agreeable—more days, more dollars. But it will cost you another fifty pounds or so above the charter money."

"Well, I shall spend it for the benefit of my

complexion, Lowry. Now, hurry up with our traps, Tommy. I'm going to eat a supper that will astonish you, Lowry."

As soon as he reached the vessel he went below, and wrote letters to his sister and Kate, enclosed them in an old piece of an oilskin coat given him by Lowry, then called Tommy, and told him to go on shore again, and secure it to Waterboy's mane. His object was to allay any fears about him if the two station horses got to Ocho Rios before the lugger. The yellow packet would be sure to be noticed, and opened. He had carefully avoided any mention of his encounter with Aulain, and had also cautioned Tommy on the subject: he did not want his sister and Kate to know anything of the matter, from himself at least. He had decided upon a pardonable fiction—he would tell them that he had been thrown from his horse, and received a rather bad cut; of his bullet wound and the tragedy at the Rocky Waterholes he made no allusion.

"It's no use worrying them over nothing," he said to Lowry, when he had told the seaman the story of the attack by Forreste and his gang. "In a week or so I'll be as fit as you are. But you'll have to back me up in what I have written about you being afraid that we are in for a week or two of calm; they won't forgive me

in a hurry if they ascertain that instead of being becalmed, the *Fanny Sabina* was cruising merrily about the Gulf of Carpentaria."

Lowry gave his promise, and then he and his passenger had supper on deck under the awning which covered the smart little vessel's deck from bow to stern.

At dawn next morning, Gerrard, after a delightfully refreshing sleep, was awakened by the captain.

"Rouse up, Mr Gerrard. We're underway, and I want to know the programme."

"How far to Cape Keer-weer?"

"Four days' sail in such light weather as this."

"That will suit me. I'll be able to begin to enjoy myself by then, and I want to see those big lagoons near the Cape. Tommy says that they are alive with game, and you and I can put in a day or two there."

"Just the thing. I've a couple of good guns on board," then he turned to the man at the tiller.

"Keep her south, my lad. For'ard there, set the squaresail. Now, Mr Gerrard, you'll see what the little *Fanny Sabina* can do even in a light wind like this," and Lowry looked with an air of pride at his dainty little craft.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON the evening of the eleventh day, after leaving the Coen, the cutter let go her anchor at a spot about a mile from the wreck of the old Dutch ship, and Gerrard prepared to go on shore, for he meant to walk to the station that night. He had now so completely recovered from both the bullet wound and the slash inflicted by Aulain's whip, that Lowry declared he looked all the better for what he had gone through.

"Well, I should not grumble, I suppose, Lowry," said his passenger, as he surveyed his features in the cabin mirror over the captain's table, "but it is enough to make any one swear. Just as I was getting rid of the alligator beauty marks on one side of my face, I get a thundering slash on the other, which will take another three months to get tanned up to the rich, soiled leather hue of the rest of my hide."

As he was speaking, Tommy put his black face down through the open skylight, and said

that he could see a camp fire on shore—just above the landing-place.

"It must be some one from the station, Lowry," cried Gerrard, as he and the captain came on deck, and as he spoke, there came a *coo-e-e*! from the shore. It was Jim's voice. He answered at once.

Bidding the mate hang a riding light on the forestay, Lowry got his night glasses, and turned them upon the fire.

"There are four people, Mr Gerrard, with six or seven horses. Ah, they are rigging a tent. I suppose it is a party from the station. They must have seen us before dark, and have come to meet you. Well, the boat is all ready for you, sir."

In a few minutes Gerrard and Tommy were being paddled swiftly to the shore, and as they drew nearer the fire, they were able to make out the four figures as those of Kate, Mary Rayner, Jim, and a white stockman. All were busied about the tent, and as yet had not seen the boat. Then Gerrard gave a loud hail.

"Hallo there, you people!"

An answering yell from Jim and a shriek of delight from Mary, and as the boat's bows cut into the soft sand, they rushed towards it, followed by Kate. Disengaging himself from

their frantic embraces he met Kate, and drew her to him.

"All well, Kate?"

"Yes, Tom," she whispered.

"What brought you here?"

"Your letter, of course! Waterboy and the other horse came home this afternoon, and Lizzie said that if we liked we could come and camp here until you came. And just after dark, as we got here, we fancied we heard the sound of the vessel anchoring, and so Jim *coo-e-e-d*."

Gerrard bent towards her again.

"Mary and Jim, run along and help poor Harry with the tent." Then in a whisper: "Tom, keep quiet—we are right in the light of the fire."

"Yes, run along," added Gerrard; "we'll be with you in a minute. Oh, Jim, stop a moment! Would you and Mary like to go on board the vessel to-morrow morning, and see Captain Lowry's curios?"

"Oh, yes, Uncle," was the unsuspecting reply.

"Then you and Harry can camp here to-night, and have a good time on board in the morning. I'm in no end of a hurry to get home, and see your Aunt Lizzie. But I'll be back before breakfast to-morrow."

"Are you staying with us too, Miss Fraser?" asked Jim.

"No, I think I had better go on with your uncle. It wouldn't be fair to let him ride home alone, would it?"

"No, I suppose not," observed Jim with unnecessary dryness in his voice; "he might get lost."

Gerrard laughed, and tried to seize the lad by his arm, but he was too quick for him.

"How are you, Harry?" he said to the stockman, as he held out his hand. "Cattle all right?"

"Right as rain, boss. How's yourself?"

"Bully. Oh, I say, Harry; the youngsters want very much to have a look at the ship to-morrow. I daresay you would too."

"I would, boss, seein' 'as I never was on board a real sailin' boat."

"Well, you can all go on board to-morrow. Miss Fraser and I will push on home, so if you'll saddle our horses for us, I'll finish the tent for you."

A quarter of an hour later everything had been finished—the tent set up, and the horses saddled and in readiness.

"Good - night, youngsters," cried Gerrard, swinging himself into his saddle, and then with

Kate by his side, they turned their horses heads toward the dark line of sleeping forest.

"Oh, Tom, I forgot," said Kate, after they had ridden for a mile or so; "I have some letters for you," and she took them out of her saddle pouch.

The master of Ocho Rios let fall his reins, and glanced at the superscriptions on the envelopes.

"Pull up a minute, Kate. I want to look at this one—the others can wait."

He opened the letter, lit a match, and glanced at the few lines it contained. Then he threw away the match, and placed the letter in his pocket.

"Kate."

"Yes, Tom dear?"

"It's from Templeton" (the Gold Commissioner).

"Well, Tom?"

"Well, Kate? He will be at Ocho Rios on the 27th. Are you glad, or is it too soon for you?"

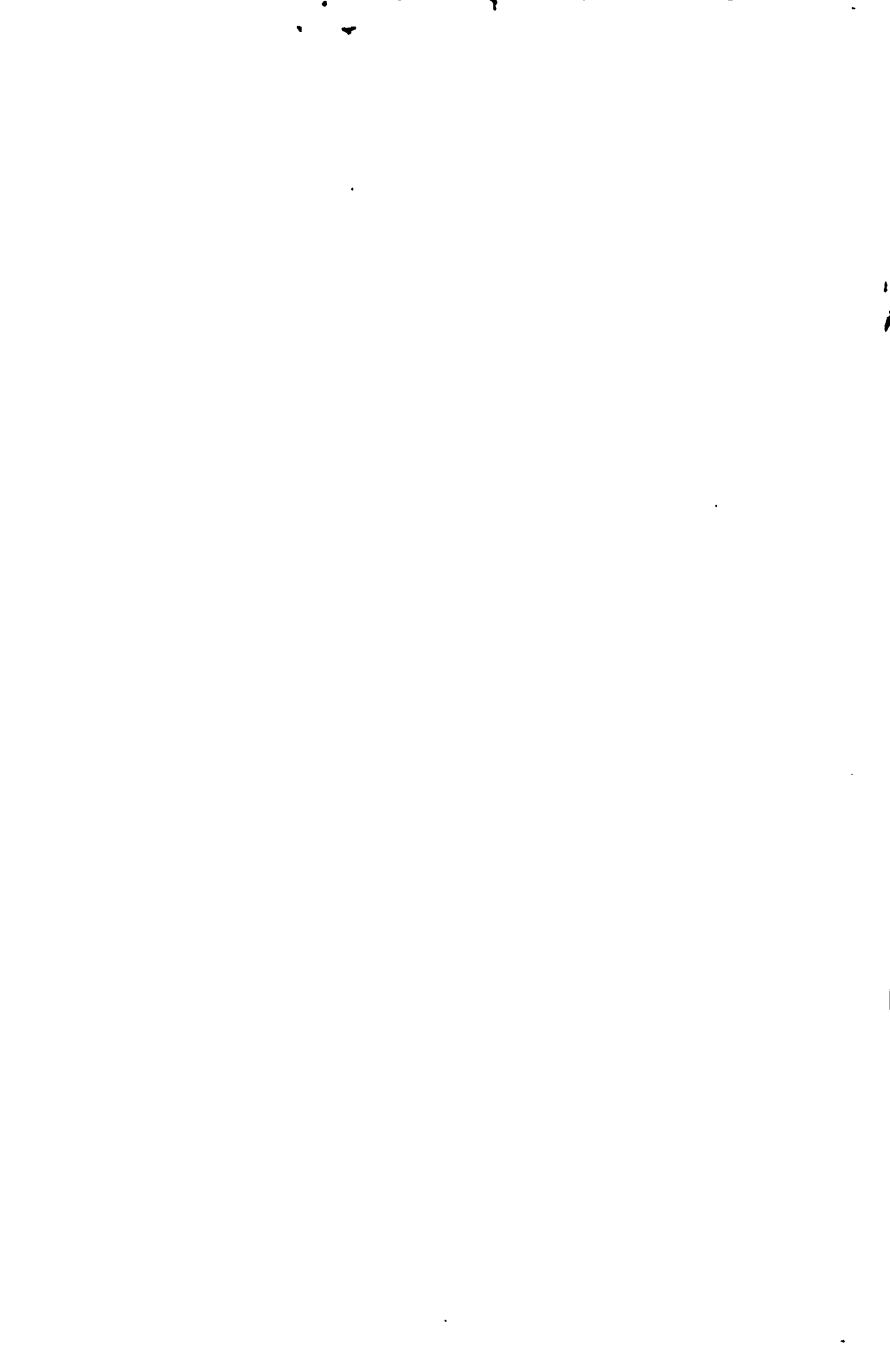
"No, Tom," she whispered.

He drew her to him once more, and pressed his lips to hers, and then in happy silence, side by side, they cantered home through the darkened forest and under the star-lit sky.

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For the purpose of the
present investigation, the
following data were obtained
from the records of the
Department of the Interior
for the years 1900 to 1909.

